Encounters with the Ineffable in Selected Artworks by Anish Kapoor and Karel Nel

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Arts in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Sheekha Kalan Date

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Abstract

In this research I examine how the ineffable is addressed and explored in selected artworks by British-Indian artist Anish Kapoor (b 1954) and South African artist Karel Nel (b 1955). I introduce the notion of the ineffable, described as that which is too great or profound to be expressed in words; the ungraspable, indescribable, indefinable. It is often linked to the spiritual, the fluid and unfixed, the transcendent and the notion of the revelatory. I consider it alongside related terms such as the sublime, the numinous, the mystical etc. In examining how it can be seen to link to artists' aesthetic pursuits, I briefly consider the idea of the shamanistic role of the artist in providing a 'transformative event' of bringing the invisible into visible form. My primary focus is on how both Kapoor and Nel can be seen to use their chosen materials, forms, and means of display to engage with ideas that relate to the metaphysical and allude to the intuitive and the spiritual. Their interest in Buddhist philosophy and the notion of reconciliation of opposites as well as their exploration of space and the idea of the immaterial becoming object is related to my discussion of their artworks in terms of evoking the ineffable. Kapoor's biomorphic sculptural forms covered in powder pigments, examples of his reflective stainless steel sculptures and two recent site-specific installation artworks using smoke and water are closely examined as are examples of Nel's two-dimensional drawings using pastels, powdered earth pigments, carboniferous salts and dust and two of his site-specific installation artworks involving the use of water and refracted/reflected light. I finally discuss my own creative work in relation to the above as presented in my exhibition titled *Ātmān*.

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Introduction

The notion of the ineffable is closely linked to mystical or spiritual discourse. In researching the topic of the ineffable in art, I came across many ideas and thoughts of artists and philosophers who have addressed this subject either from a spiritual perspective or a more broadly metaphysical or psychological one.[1] At the start of his book *Spirituality in Contemporary Art: The Idea of the Numinous* Jungu Yoon (2010: 6) notes: "Throughout history and across geographical, cultural and faith boundaries, […] artists have persistently striven to represent spiritual beliefs and values as well as to critique them." He goes on to say that many contemporary artists exploit the idea of the ineffable

> […] in their attempts to celebrate or revive a sense of the spiritual (or the numinous), which arguably has been denigrated or ignored in recent times […] Although both medium and message have taken on different apparel over the ages, the relationship between art and spirituality is as vibrant as ever; representations of the numinous have changed but not disappeared (Yoon 2010: 25).[2]

Spirituality is clearly a question that has occupied a great number of minds over the centuries and many artists have approached the territory in their creative work, exploring ways in which to reveal or express a sense of the ineffable. Artist Lex Thompson (2013: 2) notes the following about the ineffable:

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[1] Commenting on the unease with which philosophers have approached the topic of the ineffable and the various positions taken by scholars on the topic of *Aesthetic Ineffability*, Rafael De Clercq (2000: 88) notes: "Ineffability is, by definition, difficult to discuss (and, what might be worse, the notion carries religious connotations). Therefore, it is certainly tempting to 'quine' this alleged incapacity, that is, to deny its existence or importance, even though this is evident to most people. Not surprisingly, then, there are authors who question that aesthetic experience brings us in touch with something – a meaning or content – that cannot be put in (literal, unambiguous…) words. On the other hand, there are also those who doubt only the *importance* of such meanings or contents, accepting, nonetheless, their existence. Both positions are, I suspect, symptomatic of the unease with which some analytic philosophers – aspiring a maximum of clarity and explicitness – have approached the problem of ineffability."

[2] Jungu Yoon is a South Korean artist now living and working in London. He is a researcher at FADE (Chelsea and Camberwell) in the International Centre for Fine Art Research. He completed an MA in Printmaking at Camberwell College of Art in 2003 and an Mphil in Fine Art at the University of London in 2008. His book on Spirituality in Contemporary Art – The Idea of the Numinous is of particular interest because he writes as an artist, not art historian, and from an Eastern heritage (zidanepress.org.uk/…/spirituality-in-contemporary-art.htm…).

> The best religious art has been about this. Certain elements of abstraction have been about this. These frameworks offer particular tools, complex symbology and non-representational form, for coping with that which is beyond comprehension[3] (http://www.lavalette.com/f-that-photography-and-the-ineffable/).

Commenting on the relationship between ineffability and religion, musicologist Willemien Froneman notes the following:

> The concept of the ineffable derives from ancient Greek philosophy of religion and has been closely associated with religious thought ever since. This association might be said to rest solely on the fact that the ineffable as a concept holds a central place in religious discourse. It was, after all, in writing about the One, the absolute God, that Plotinus developed the first detailed theory of the ineffable. In modern times, however, we do not reserve the category of the ineffable exclusively for talking about God. We are often lost for words when talking about our feelings. We cannot describe situations adequately, colours lose their hues in conversation, but above all, our experience of music seems for the most part to be beyond words […] Attempts to put states of ineffable knowledge into words very often result in a language that has significant religious resonances […] Even though knowledge of God is not the *only* ineffable state of knowledge, the temptation to translate *any* ineffable state of knowledge into words, like our experience of colour or music, often goes along with "images of unlimitedness and infinitude" (Moore 2003: 167). In more general terms, the "images of unlimitedness and infinitude" that are conjured up by claims of ineffability can be described as the longing for an absolute, godlike entity (Froneman 2009: 2-3).[4]

In light of the above, communicating the ineffable by means of associations, imagery and symbolism is, as Caballero Rodriguez (2010: 1) puts it, "a way of expression which surpasses the limitations of conventional reason." [5]

As aesthetic category the concept of the ineffable is closely related to the notion of the sublime - understood as that which "takes hold of us when reason falters and certainties

[3] Lex Thompson is a practicing photographer and professor of art at Bethel University, Minnesota. His photographic work focuses on manifestations of hope and failure in the American landscape (http://www.bethel.edu/academics/faculty/thompson-lex).

[4] Willemien Froneman is a postdoctoral research fellow at Stellenbosch University where she completed her doctorate in Music in 2012. She also holds an M.Phil in Musicology from Cambridge University.

[5] Dr Beatriz Caballero Rodriquez is a lecturer in the Spanish Programme at the University of Canterbury. The focus of her research is twentieth century Spanish philosophy (ir.caterbury.ac.nz/handle/10092/3743).

begin to crumble," or "moments of mute encounter with all that exceeds our comprehension" (Morley 2010: 12). Music specialist Judy Lochhead (2008: 63) refers to the ineffable as the "twin" or the "rebound of the sublime [that] offers itself as the "unpresentable" and inexpressible." [6]

Whilst the various descriptions and observations by artists and philosophers may differ somewhat, they also underscore similarities and agreements on what is experienced when encountering the ineffable. In my research I will introduce the concept of the ineffable in art alongside related terms such as the spiritual, the sublime, the numinous, liminal and experiential in order to situate my discussion of the artworks of two contemporary artists: the British-Asian artist Anish Kapoor and the South African artist Karel Nel. The scope of my research does not allow me to provide a full history of the notion of the ineffable but I will address the concept and how it can be understood to feature in certain artworks before discussing my two chosen artists' works. I will examine issues of the ineffable and spiritual and how an ineffable character can be ascribed to the physical artworks themselves in selected works by both artists. The artworks of Kapoor and Nel can be usefully considered within a conceptual framework provided by the concept of the ineffable and my main interest lies in examining how the two artists can be seen to invoke the experience of the ineffable through their own visual language in selected artworks.

Encounters with the ineffable are not limited to the field of art. The ineffable describes that which is too great or profound to be expressed in words. To say that something is 'ineffable' means that, because it is so overwhelming, it cannot (or should not) be expressed in spoken language. It describes a feeling that is too big to be adequately described or that which cannot be conveyed in language, but can only be internally experienced (as/by individuals).[7] It can be experienced whilst alone, for example, in

[6] In her article *The Sublime, the Ineffable, and Other Dangerous Aesthetics* (2008), Lochhead outlines how the philosophical and aesthetic resurgence of these two concepts in the latter half of the twentieth century has been the subject of intense scrutiny in the field of the arts. However, she also raises a red flag as to how terms such as the sublime, the ineffable, the unpresentable, the uncanny, and immanence may be seen to "mask sedimented gender binaries that will keep the feminine in the ground along with the beautiful" (2008: 72).

[7] De Clercq (2000: 88) puts it as follows: "language, at least in its literal mode, is not able to capture fully the content of an aesthetic experience; aesthetic experience, therefore, may be said to put us in touch with the unsayable or 'ineffable'."

admiring the beauty of nature, or through interaction with other people (as in religious or spiritual gatherings and in interpersonal relationships). The ineffable may also relate to an understanding of what may be termed the 'divine' or a fundamental energy force in life, as the profundity of the experience is sometimes associated with revelation and the sacred. Many holy places such as temples, mosques and churches are designed with the intention of creating an experience of the divine. In such venues the divine is invoked through prayer and religious ritual and this can lead to an experience of the ineffable.

Ultimately, in relation to artworks and specific physical locations, the ineffable is about an experience or experiences that are generated or seem to "originate from outside the self but are perceived within" (Yoon 2010: 26). Rumanian anthropologist Mircea Eliade classifies this kind of experience as:

> The feeling of terror before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery (*mysterium tremendum*); the majesty (*majestas*) that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power; religious fear before the fascinating mystery (*mysterium fascinans*) (Eliade cited in Yoon 2010: 27).

As Yoon goes on to note, a true understanding of this kind of phenomenon "has to appear through the intrinsic characteristics of an object, which delivers numinous feeling […] Specific examples of contemporary art […] function as effective vehicles to evoke or access the numinous" (2010: 29). In the field of the visual arts, the philosophical notion of the ineffable usually refers to the idea "that works of art express what cannot be expressed in ordinary discourse" and in this sense such artworks are able to transcend language (Kennick 1961: 309). De Clercq (2000: 88) states "it is aesthetic experience itself which rouses in us this sense of something being ineffable." In this sense art is seen as embodying a quality that goes beyond common thought and experience. The ineffable denotes a sense of the infinite since the experience of it cannot be quantified.

My decision to research encounters with the ineffable in selected contemporary artists' works comes from my own preoccupation with exploring the evocation of the ineffable in my art. It also relates to certain spiritual practices that I have engaged in over the

years. [8] I am intrigued and inspired by the unknown or unseen and how an introspective approach to creating art may be used to link to such ideas. Through my own art and spiritual practices I have sought to understand aspects of the synchronistic relationship between an 'inner reality' and outward manifestations of it. Rodriguez (2010: 2) touches on this relationship when she points out that art understood as

> […] a means and materialisation of self-discovery […] has the capacity to access and connect us with a primordial knowledge which we cannot otherwise – or very rarely – access, and which in time has a transforming effect on the self. Moreover, having this access holds a potential for transformation for both artist and viewer.

I am interested in this idea of seeing art as holding a key for personal transformation and for self-actualization. Rodriguez (2010: 2) goes on to say that artworks have "the capacity to trigger associations and communicate concepts and emotions which ordinarily escape us, as a result of the restraints to rationality and the limitations of verbal language."

I have chosen to focus on artists Kapoor and Nel because their artworks exemplify a contemporary preoccupation with the ineffable through the exploration of materials, forms and their spatial articulation. I will examine selected works of theirs to demonstrate how both artists exploit their artistic presentation in order to create an encounter between the viewer and the ineffable. Both artists' works also reflect an interest in a variety of cultures and approaches to spirituality and they reference philosophies embedded in various cultures. The abstract nature of Kapoor's sculptures and the ability of his artworks to embody profound concepts through quite simple or primary forms relates to my own concerns in my creative work. I have chosen to look at his works titled: *As if to Celebrate, I discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981), *Mother as a Mountain* (1985), *Vertigo* (2008), *Ascension* (2011) and *Descension* (2014). These works can be seen to define some of the major styles and themes that Kapoor has worked with over the years and will enable me to examine his main concerns and modes of working.

[8] My introduction to meditation, the study of Holy Hindu texts, the path of having a Sadguru (a spiritual teacher) and the nature of the guru-disciple relationship to cultivate an inner wisdom and grow towards understanding a divine force within and without began at the age of 12. I am currently practicing the Atma Kriya as taught by Sri Swami Vishwananda and Mahavatar Kriya Babaji (the Paramguru of Paramhansa Yogananada, author of *The Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946)).

The first selected works *As if to Celebrate, I discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981) and *Mother as a Mountain* (1985) are examples of Kapoor's early 'pigment' sculptures that present abstract forms dusted with, and sometimes made entirely from, brightly coloured powder pigments. *Vertigo* (2008) is an example of Kapoor's more recent and perhaps better known stainless steel sculptures with their highly reflective mirror surfaces. About these reflective works Kapoor (2010: n.p.) comments that: "the edge of the object is undefined" and they clearly engage with the perception of form and its dissolution. Form defining itself and yet also dissolving embodies a duality. This is a powerfully transformative element in his work and I will investigate how he uses it as a potent trigger for perception. The final two works, *Ascension* (2011) and *Descension* (2014), are examples of his most recent site-specific installations in which he explores the idea of the immaterial or the 'unformed' becoming an object (in exploring the transience of smoke through creating a rising column in the San Giorgio basilica, Venice) and a perpetual state of flux and motion (in creating a spiraling vortex of black water in the floor of Aspinwall House in Fort Kochi, India; also exhibited at Galleria Continua, Italy and most recently at the Gardens of Versailles, France (2015)).

Nel has had a very direct influence on my own work in guiding me as my tutor during my undergraduate years of Fine Arts study. Through the interaction with him I have become interested in looking more deeply at his art practice and ideas which engage with links between inner, outer and liminal space and the reconciliation of duality of light and dark, physically and metaphorically. I initially focus my examination on selected artworks from the *Silent Thresholds* exhibition (2013): *Radiance: The House Within* (2013) and *At the Threshold* (2013). Later on I also discuss works that reflect on Nel's participation in the Cosmic Evolution Survey project (COSMOS) and how his works exhibited in the *Brilliance of Darkness* (2008) exhibition grew out of this involvement. The works from this exhibition to be examined include: *Stellar Calculus* (2008), *Composing Darkness* (2008) and *Sound Syntax* (2008). Finally, I also discuss two of Nel's site-specific installations involving the use of water and light: *Trembling Field* (2009) and *Reflective Field* (2011).

Chapter One provides an introduction to the notion of the ineffable and how it can be seen to link to artists' aesthetic pursuits in conveying an experience of transcendence or

a form of knowledge beyond the rational. The pursuit of the spiritual has often been argued to have much in common with the pursuit of the aesthetic and I briefly introduce texts that address this and an understanding of the spiritual in art. The notion of the sublime is closely associated with the ineffable and is briefly defined in terms of its various formulations over the years. The shamanistic role of the artist in providing a 'transformative event' of bringing the invisible into visible form is touched on in relation to visual art objects and installations that can be shown to provide experiences of the ineffable through a form of sensory immersion. My two chosen artists, Kapoor and Nel, are shown to create such immersive experiences in allowing one's awareness to become more acute. Their interest in Buddhist philosophy and the notion of reconciliation of opposites and their exploration of space and the idea of the immaterial becoming an object through a process of 'doing' is briefly outlined.

Chapter Two examines the creative practice of Anish Kapoor and focuses on selected works ranging from earlier explorations with abstract forms and powder pigments (in the early 1980s) to his more recent mirror works made in stainless steel as well as two site-specific installation-based artworks that use elements of smoke and water. In examining Kapoor's creative process I consider some of his comments on his creative work such as his insistence on 'not having anything to say' and his feeling of 'not knowing' and how these can be seen to relate to an engagement with the ineffable. Kapoor's pigment series of works are discussed in relation to his realization of the so-called 'non-object.' The influence of his Indian heritage in choosing to use materials such as brightly coloured powders as well as the introduction of ritualistic elements in his work are also considered. His later use of the mirror surface as a tool to destabilize the viewer's perceptual experience of space continues my discussion of the 'non-object' and I make reference to the "Jantar Mantar Observatory" in Delhi, India, as one of Kapoor's significant points of inspiration for these reflective works. Lastly, I discuss Kapoor's engagement with the theme of the void in his site-specific installation *Descension* and how he deals with the idea of the 'non-object' becoming an object in *Ascension*, also a site-specific installation.

In Chapter Three I examine Karel Nel's creative work and start by looking at early influences and his varied research that informs his artworks in profound ways. Nel's interest in diverse fields that question the nature of existence and his collecting of

artefacts from various cultures can be seen to play a central role in how he engages with ideas around the physical and metaphysical, the seen and unseen. I start my discussion of his creative work by focusing on selected works from his *Silent Thresholds* (2013) exhibition in which Nel refers to Constantin Brancusi's studio as a source of inspiration. The significance of the studio space to both artists' creative work is briefly discussed and reference is made to the notion of 'aura' as it can be seen to feature in Nel's drawings. I then move on to Nel's participation in the Cosmic Evolution Survey (COSMOS) and how this involvement encapsulates his deep interest in the link between scientific thought and discovery and the visual arts. His works on the *Brilliance of Darkness* exhibition (2008) are considered in relation to the scientific explorations of this project. I finally discuss two of Nel's site-specific installation artworks that introduce water as an element in the refraction and reflection of light into surrounding space: *Trembling Field* (2009) and *Reflective Field* (2011). My examination of the selected artworks provide insight into his use of physical objects, materials, substances and spatial articulation in evoking the ineffable.

Chapter Four focuses on my own exhibition of creative work titled *Ātmān* presented in the "Point of Order" exhibition space, Wits University, Johannesburg, from 23 - 30 of April 2015. I introduce the works that were displayed on the exhibition as well as how materials and processes were used in realising individual works as well as the display as a whole. Starting with the smaller embroidered and hand stitched works as an important impetus to the body of work, I discuss my choice of using thread (string) in relation to explorations with the two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Making brief reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String* (1942) and other artists' engagements with the material, I also touch on some cultural and religious significances attached to thread. I then focus on my three large canvases and their installation in the gallery space together with powder paints sifted onto the floor at their bases plus the three large drawings on paper that accompanied them. My concerns in these works are outlined with some reference to the works of Kapoor and Nel and also the pollen field and beeswax works of Wolfgang Laib. The title of the exhibition, *Ātmān*, is expanded on in discussing links to the notion of the ineffable.

In my Conclusion I draw together the observations made in the preceding chapters and consolidate my discussion on the notion of the ineffable and how it can be seen to be

articulated in the works of Anish Kapoor and Karel Nel as well as my own creative works and in relation to an understanding of the term *Ātmān*.

Chapter One: Introducing the Ineffable

> To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which neither can be seen nor made visible: this is what is at stake in modern painting. But how to make visible that there is something that cannot be seen? (Jean-Francois Lyotard (1982) cited in Haberkorn 2007: 1).

This is the question posed at the beginning of an article titled *Transforming the Invisible* by Christine Haberkorn. [9] In the broader sense of transforming the unseen into the seen, this question not only applies to 'modern painting' (in the context of discussion by French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard) but also to artists working in other mediums and includes those who practice in the fields of language, science and music, amongst many others.[10] Lex Thompson (2013: 2) comments as follows in dealing with that which is beyond comprehension

> […] there isn't really a visual equivalent for the ineffable, at least not one that holds the ineffable's relationship to the transcendent as well as to the inexpressible. One could go with the prosaic, unviewable, or the slightly more mysterious, invisible, to deal with the simple inability to see a thing. (http://www.lavalette.com/f-that-photography-and-the-ineffable/)

As already mentioned in the introduction, it is a terrain of experiences which can be described in terms such as the sublime, the numinous, revelation, liminal experience, transcendence and possibly even disorientation or dread, to name a few. In his essay *Art and the Ineffable*, William. E. Kennick (1961: 310-311) points out that "ordinary language cannot convey to us "the precise character" of feelings." According to Lyotard the work of an artist is about how to transform the invisible into a physical artwork, embodying the experience of the invisible. It is within this process that the ineffable is first experienced by the artist.[11] Haberkorn (2007: 1) expands as follows:

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[9] Christine Haberkorn is a trained visual artist, post-secondary arts and humanities teacher, curator and nonprofit cultural arts strategist. In her PhD thesis submitted at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, 2010, she focused on *The Dialogic Self: How Conceptual Artists Recognize and Describe Transcendent Moments with a Creative Unconscious* (gallery.mailchimp.com).

[10] Lyotard wrote two influential essays in the 1980s that provided the theoretical underpinnings for discussions on the contemporary sublime: *Presenting the Unpresentable: the Sublime* (1982) which first appeared in *Artforum* and *The Sublime and the Avant-garde* (1984). These essays "announced the centrality to the theory of postmodernism of Kant's concept of the sublime. Lyotard's texts subsequently spawned a voluminous debate, and in 1985 'Les Immatériaux', an exhibition curated by Lyotard at the Georges Pompidou in paris, brought these ideas to a wider public" (Morley, 2010: 13).

[11] This point about the ineffable source of creativity applies not only to the visual arts but also other creative fields and endeavors such as literature, music, the sciences, to name a few.

> To embrace the unseen, the visual artist confronts a subtle realm that is transcendent and paradoxical by defying the boundaries of visual language and physical time. The visual artist is both a receptacle and a vehicle for the expression of the inexpressible.

Haberkorn (2007: 13) goes on to speak in terms of 'the artist as mystic' as being "a transmitter of the invisible experience as a visible manifestation" and that the ""mystical (peak) experience" is a disorientation in time and space that contrasts sharply with normal experience" (Haberkorn 2007: 18). This formulation connects closely to the experience of the ineffable or the sublime, defined by Simon Morley as

> […] when formal and objectively ordered social time is destabilized by some unstructured, informal and subjective 'moment' of heightened experience. A heightened time during which the self is radically altered by something that presses on us from beyond our normal reality, challenging the assumptions upon which such a reality is based (2010: 18).

Iranian born British artist Shirazeh Houshiary concurs with Haberkorn's observation when she responds in an interview to the question "who is an artist?" by saying that "an artist is someone who is capable of unveiling the invisible, not a producer of art objects." She continues:

> The figure of the artist is very similar to that of the alchemist who transforms base metal into gold; an artist is someone who can put her or himself into a 'transforming' dimension. The prime mechanism for this transformation is distancing oneself: the further we go away from ourselves, the more space we leave for what exists above us. Art uncovers a reality which is in the world, but which in some ways is also beyond the world. The object and the image which the artist creates have their place in the external world, but their essence and meaning are conceived in an inner world, and this internal world is an intermediate space between body and soul; the seat of the imagination is the soul. So that the finished work is a real experience in a state of continual becoming. Art-making is subject to a movement of ascension and descension, its is not born of the body, but becomes it (Houshiary cited in Morley 2010: 93).

The notion of an 'inner world' or an 'inner self' is defined by Houshiary as

> the place of the imagination. Daily life reality is a place of closedness, whilst imagination is one of openness. Here being is a continuous becoming – it is being as becoming. In other words, it is the moment of extreme consciousness (Houshiary cited in Morley 2010: 94).

Lyn M. Herbert[12] continues addressing the notion of the 'inner world' in writing about the American artist James Turrell who uses light as his medium. Herbert (2010: 101) speaks about Turrell's rootedness in Quaker religion with its emphasis on a spiritual inwardness as follows:

> In a Quaker meeting, the individual seeks greater awareness by looking inward (as opposed to, say, listening to a sermon). Meetings are silent to allow for this quiet, still, soul-searching contemplation. Turrell has spoken of how Quakers go inside to greet the light of revelation: 'This is something that I worked with from a very young age, and this has many connotations too. It has to do with spirit, spirituality, thought.'

In describing Turrell's light works that "allow us to see ourselves seeing" and thus "engage perception as a medium," Herbert (2010: 101) goes on to say that

> with the simplest of means, Turrell enables us to experience transcendence and to discover that, as philosopher Gaston Bachelard has written, 'Immensity is within ourselves.' Turrell once called himself an 'intranaut', someone who explores inner space instead of outer space.[13]

Andrew Czink (2007: 1) connects the mystic's and the artist's pursuits and conveys the depth of such an experience when he says the following[14]:

> […] both the mystic's spiritual and the artist's aesthetic pursuits indicate an awareness or 'understanding' of a form of knowledge beyond the rational. This knowledge is triggered and reinforced by what I refer to as passionate epiphanies: brief, intense encounters with beauty, wonder and love that cannot be reduced to the rational. This knowledge forms the basis of a passionate, embodied engagement with the world that may provide pathways to liberating, ecstatic experiences for the individual and perhaps

[12] Lyn M. Herbert is an independent curator and art historian, and Adjunct Curator for the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, where she was Senior Curator from 1999 to 2007. Her publications include *The Inward Eye: Transcendence in Contemporary Art* (2002) (Morley 2010: 225).

[13] All fields that question and seek to explore such an 'inner reality' address the mind, spirit and existence. This searching engages the ineffable in being open to encounters with a metaphysical order. The one who searches for an understanding of the unknown and unexplainable, and who may also aim to express it, can be said to be taken to the core of his/her being (or taken to the depth of the unknown). By this I mean that in order for one to relay or express a certain notion or experience, one has to have known it from within, hence having the experience of the unknown and ineffable in such pursuit of it.

[14] Andrew Czink is a composer, pianist, audio engineer and educator based in Vancouver. His PhD research is on the philosophy of musical experience as a sonorous practice from the perspective of the composer/improvisor/performer (www.burnaby.ca/Assets/Shadbolt-AIRAndrew.pdf).

> even contributes to the dynamic process of defining the self and constituting meaning.

These moments of truth and understanding may not always need a formal location or situation and can be experienced within one's self through meditation, with an interaction or communication with another person or even during 'ordinary' everyday acts. For this reason, the ineffable experience is individual as it is universal. Czink (2007: 2-3) goes on to say:

> The pursuit of the spiritual (of God, enlightenment etc.) has much in common with the pursuit of the aesthetic. Where the artist experiences beauty, love, and wonder in the corporal world, the mystic experiences these in God and the divine. In both cases the passionate epiphany is a sudden insight, a flash, a moment of ecstasy and loss of the self. A form of union occurs between the individual and the object of the experience.

There are many instances where the physical is used to create an ineffable experience. Examples of this can be found in the art and architecture of religious buildings such as cathedrals, temples, mosques as well as gardens that enhance and create such experiences. The experience of the sacred and ineffable in such environments is often linked to sensory immersion within such spaces. Visual art objects and installations are equally capable of generating such experiences of immersion, as will become clearer in my discussion of Kapoor's and Nel's artworks later on.

A preoccupation with space, intense experience and becoming really aware is very much part of contemporary installation art and some forms of contemporary sculpture. Claire Bishop (2005: n.p) describes the aim of installation art as being "to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space" and this usually leads to an "immersive experience." She goes on to write about the immersive capabilities of installation art as constituting a breakthrough in the sphere of art practice and says the following:

> Installation art […] differs from traditional media (sculpture, painting, photography, video) in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space […] installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision (Bishop cited in Coulter-Smith 2006 (ch2): 1).

The power of the immersive experience is one that shifts one's view significantly and it may generate an ineffable experience.

Philosophy is deeply embedded in any discussion of the ineffable and the manifestation of it within the field of the fine arts inevitably raises questions about "expressing what cannot be expressed in ordinary discourse," as already mentioned in the introduction (Kennick 1961: 309). Nagarjuna, in the book *The Zen Experience*, speaks of the "distrust of words" and notes that the "sphere of Truth is beyond the noise of verbal teaching. How then can it be made the subject of discussion? Still I cannot remain silent" (cited in Hoover 1980: 22). The "distrust of words" refers to the inability of words to contain the whole experience. Words are nevertheless a means of arriving at the place where they are no longer needed. Kennick (1961: 310) speaks in this sense about works of art as "vehicles of communication."

The Russian abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky, one of the founding figures of abstract painting, wrote his well-known text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1910)[15] at the beginning of the twentieth century and it became the touchstone for all subsequent writing on the subject by modernist art historians, theorists and critics. In it he described art as a "language which speaks to the soul" and if artists do not take up the challenge to create art, "a chasm remains unbridged, and there is no power entitled to take the place of art" (1946: 94). He went on to speak about a "spiritual revolution" which he believed was occurring at the time of his writing:

> When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on himself. Literature, music and art are the first and most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but on the other hand they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas, which give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul (Kandinsky cited in Taylor 2012: 22).

[15] The text to which I refer in the following paragraphs are from the second printing of the English translation of Kandinsky's text titled *On the Spiritual in Art* published by Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in 1946.

Kandinsky believed that the light of spiritual renewal was dawning in the midst of the darkness of the pervasive materialism of his time. He speaks about an "inner necessity" being the main guide in making art and notes that the 'soul' within artworks is lost because people, artists included, "are only interested in material possessions and welcome any technical advancement, which only helps man's body, proclaiming this servitude as an achievement of major magnitude, while spiritual forces are neglected, if not completely ignored" (Kandinsky 1946: 18). He proposes an art that would be "food for the spirit" and that would arise from the inner feelings expressing a truth beyond the material pleasures and strife. He states: "All these forms, when truly artistic, fulfill their purpose and (as in the former instance) become food for the spirit." Commenting on the reception of artworks by viewers, Kandinsky further states: "the observer of today, however, is seldom attuned to those subtler vibrations. In the realm of art, he seeks a mere imitation of nature by serving a practical purpose." He seems to imply that if artists themselves are creating from a place of sincerity and conviction they can shift the thoughts and emotions of the viewer. He then continues: "His [the artist's] creative work will surely arouse in observers, who are capable of deeper response, emotions which cannot be defined in words" (Kandinsky 1946: 11).

Within the field of art, the metaphysical and physical are interdependent and art is a very powerful space in which practitioners are able to use physical materials to express and evoke feelings that language cannot reproduce or give us insight into. Marc C. Taylor[16] (2012: 14) notes in his book *Refiguring the Spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy*, that "[t]he collapse of financial capitalism creates the opportunity for reassessment of values that extends far beyond money and art" and he picks up on what Kandinsky had hoped, namely, that art would take people back to their human spirit which would reduce the obsession with material life and to live more deeply, internally satisfying lives. Western art was previously linked to the church and it is only in the past two centuries that the purpose for making art has been located in the individual's experience and, for example, in depicting aspects of city life, politics and social

[16] Mark C. Taylor is professor of religion, chair of the Department of Religion, and co-director of the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life at Columbia University. He is the author of more than 25 books, including most recently, Crisis on Campus: A Bold Plan for Reforming Our colleges and Universities; Field Notes from Elsewhere: Reflections on Dying and Living; and After God (http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-15766-7/refiguring-the-spiritual).

inequality. This has also brought about the focus on the notion of one's own spirituality beyond that of any specific affiliation to a religion.

Yoon (2010: 6-7) expresses this shift by suggesting that the word 'numinous' is more appropriate when talking about the spiritual elements in contemporary art:

> 'Numinous' and 'holiness' are words that are closely related; both conveying deeply felt spiritual significance. Consequently the words are sometimes seen as interchangeable. However, in interrogating the spiritual elements in contemporary art, I suggest that the use of the word numinous is a more appropriate choice than the terms holy or sacred since it not only captures but also transcends the essence of spirituality within a religious context, and therefore has the potential to signify a wider understanding of spirituality in contemporary society.

He then sets out to differentiate certain terms related to the spiritual and provides a brief historical survey of religion and spirituality in art, examining how the term numinous has been conceptualized and utilized, both historically and in contemporary culture. While the scope of my study does not allow me to cover this terrain, Yoon's differentiation of certain terms related to the numinous is valuable to my research. He notes that "[…] the definition of the numinous on its own is not sufficient to articulate the kinds of spirituality evidenced in contemporary art practice. Therefore, the terms 'spirituality' and 'sublime,' both frequently distinguished from religion, are used in order to clarify more precisely what is to be understood by the contemporary idea of the numinous." He goes on to say:

> 'Spirituality' in its usual sense is contrasted with the physical world and oneself, and may include an emotional experience of awe and reverence. Similarly, like the numinous, spirituality includes all aspects of mysticism, occult and religiously inspired feelings. Spirituality may also include the development of the individual's inner life through practices such as meditation and prayer, including the search for God, the supernatural and a divine influence. However, this definition of the spiritual is too general and nebulous and the term numinous better articulates the kind of spirituality evidenced in contemporary art practice (Yoon 2010: 13).

On the terms 'mysticism' and 'inner reality' Yoon (2010: 29) comments as follows: "[...] mysticism is a broader spiritual concept than the numinous because mysticism extends to include every kind of inner reality in addition to the external presence or reality of the numinous." He later goes on to note that: "Fear is considered the deepest

and most fundamental dimension in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion, and the numinous feeling is also linked to the natural emotion of fear" (Yoon 2010: 39). He discusses fear in terms of a specific kind of emotional response of awe, "which is wholly distinct from that of 'being afraid.' In the context of the numinous, this awe is more than fear proper; it is a feeling of peculiar dread not to be mistaken for any ordinary experience of dread" (Yoon 2010: 39). The idea of the sacred is said by Yoon to be manifested through a "fascination with the perceived power of natural objects such as stones and trees. This expression of fear is not fear of being harmed, but fear which is awesome and frightening" (Yoon 2010: 43).

As already stated, the notion of the sublime is very closely connected to the ineffable. Many scholars have written on the subject of the sublime, artists have dealt with it in their practice and contemporary exhibitions have been mounted around the topic. The Tate Modern Art Museum in London, for example, held an exhibition titled *Art and the Sublime* in 2010 (1 February–14 November), which presented works ranging from the 17th century to the modern works of the 21st century. A series of talks coincided with the exhibition presented under the title *The Sublime in Crisis? New Perspectives on the Sublime in British Visual Culture 1760–1900*. These addressed various aspects of the sublime in the fields of psychology, Darwinism theory and with reference to the changes in Christian Art in the Victorian Period.

The word 'sublime' originated in the late 16th century from the Latin word *sublimis*, 'sub' indicating 'up to' and 'limen' relating to the English word 'threshold' (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sublime). The direct translation, 'up to the threshold', clearly links it to the notion of liminal space and the ineffable. The term, in the literary sense, has a long history dating back to the 1st or 3rd century A.D. when the philosopher Cassius Longinus wrote his text *On the Sublime* to distinguish between different qualities of writing and the ability of writing to invoke the experience, i.e. through his prose.

In the 18th century the philosophers Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant wrote on the subject of the sublime in their respective writings *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and *The Critique of Judgment* (1790). In their writings the word 'sublime' began to be used in a different context "that

reflected a new cultural awareness of the profoundly limited nature of the self, and which led artists, writers, composers and philosophers to draw attention to intense experiences which lay beyond conscious control and threatened individual autonomy" (Morley 2010: 14-15). Closely associated with the Romantic Movement, Burke and Kant's formulations of the sublime focused on the inexpressible and that which defies rational thinking. Their writings emerged at a time of great change in Europe and Britain and responded to the impact of the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and subsequent social and political developments and repercussions.[17]

Burke wrote about experiences that mix fear and delight as encountered in nature and he was interested in the experience of the beholder. The sublime experience, unlike that of experiencing beauty, had the power to transform the self and, like Longinus, he saw something ennobling in this "terror-tinged thrill, as if the challenge posed by some threat served to strengthen the self" (Morley 2010: 15). In contrast, Kant asserted that the sublime was "something that happens in the mind" rather than a formal quality of a natural phenomenon. He thereby focused his attention on the "impact and consequence of the sublime experience upon consciousness," and argued that the sublime was

> […] essentially about a negative experience of limits. It was a way of talking about what happens when we are faced with something we do not have the capacity to understand or control – something excessive […] We are made aware, Kant observed, that sometimes we cannot present to ourselves an account of an experience that is in any way coherent. We cannot encompass it by thinking, and so it remains indiscernible or

[17] Apart from his writing legacy, Edmund Burke was well known for his active role as a member of the parliament in British House of Commons. His writing, beginning with the *A Vindication of Natural Society: A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind* (1756) and then move into the philosophy of aesthetics in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Immanuel Kant, the German (Prussian) philosopher, is known as "one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Western philosophy. His contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics have had a profound impact on almost every philosophical movement that followed him." The first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is one of his most famous works, emerging from an eleven year period of isolation of which this work was possibly the result. This work challenges and establishes the relation between human experiences and reason. *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) is specifically focused towards aesthetics and is known as the third critique. "A large part of Kant's work addresses the question "What can we know?" The answer, if it can be stated simply, is that our knowledge is constrained to mathematics and the science of the natural, empirical world. It is impossible, Kant argues, to extend knowledge to the supersensible realm of speculative metaphysics. The reason that knowledge has these constraints, Kant argues, is that the mind plays an active role in constituting the features of experience and limiting the mind's access only to the empirical realm of space and time" (http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/).

> unnameable, undecidable, indeterminate and unpresentable (Morley 2010: 16). [18]

Yoon (2010: 14) notes that the term 'sublime' is more generally used "when referring to nature specifically and its greatness or vastness" and for this reason he prefers using the term numinous in the context of discussing spirituality in contemporary art as it "lacks such connotations." This idea of the sublime linked to the vastness of nature is particularly evident in landscape paintings, for example, by Joseph Mallord William Turner. In 1961 the American art historian Robert Rosenblum (1927-2006) connected this tradition of the sublime, as an art that instills feelings of fear and awe in the viewer, to the works of the American Abstract Expressionist painters who were seen to revive a concern with the deep mysteries of life. He wrote an essay titled *The Abstract Sublime* in which he related the works of some of these painters to the visionary nature-paintings of the previous centuries, considering Abstract Expressionism's interest in the sublime to be a continuation of the ideals of the Romantics. This theme was later expanded in his 1975 book *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* in which he traces the sublime as it changed from Caspar David Friedrich to Mark Rothko (http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/27/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961/). Yoon (2015: 54) similarly observes that the American Abstract Expressionist painter Mark Rothko's work "could be seen as having descended from an eighteenth - century conception of the romantic sublime, epitomized by that boundlessness of nature or vast magnitude, whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual or artistic." He perceives in this an 'urgency' and 'energy' that implies a sense of a void that opens the interpretation to Eastern philosophies of nothingness (Yoon 2010: 55). This trajectory of representation indicates a development into the abstract, experiential, subconscious and social dimensions embodied in the sublime, thus expanding the definition and terrain of the term.

In the introduction to his anthology of texts on the sublime, Simon Morley (2010: 12) characterizes sublime experience and its contemporary understanding as follows:

[18] Subsequent writings on the sublime by important thinkers include Friedrich Schiller's On the Sublime (1801), Friedrich Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (1827), Arthur Schopenauer's The World as Will and Representation (1819), Friedrich Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy (1872), Sigmund Freud's concept of 'sublimation' and the notion of the uncanny, Walter Benjamin's condition of traumatic 'shock', Carl Gustav Jung's term of 'individuation and Georges Bataille's writings on ecstasy. Morley provides a brief overview of the above in a section titled A Short History of the Sublime (2010: 14-17).

> The sublime experience is fundamentally transformative, about the relationship between disorder and order, and the disruption of the stable coordinates of time and space. Something rushes in and we are profoundly altered. And so, in looking at the relevance of the concept to contemporary art, we are also addressing an experience with implications that go far beyond aesthetics […] Today […] rather than nature, the power of technology is more likely to supply the raw material for what can be termed a characteristically contemporary sublime, as the extreme space-time compressions produced by globalized communication technologies give rise to a perception of the everyday as fundamentally destabilizing and excessive.

In a secularized contemporary world, thinkers and artists generally no longer accept traditional ideas of a "self or soul or spirit that moves upwards towards some ineffable and essential thing or power." Instead, the contemporary sublime is mostly "about immanent transcendence, about a transformative experience that is understood as occurring within the here and now" (Morley 2010: 18). In his examination of spirituality in contemporary art, Yoon suggests that in an increasingly secular society an art gallery functions similarly to a church or temple in providing an encounter with the spiritual. Nowadays artists have retained an interest in spiritual matters but "have divorced the spiritual from the religious realm and attempted to redefine the notion in secular terms" (Yoon 2010: 7-8). Artists still draw inspiration directly and indirectly from Eastern and Western spirituality and can be seen to bring such religious, spiritual and philosophical dimensions to their work, as Yoon sets out to demonstrate.

In his book *Dreaming with Open Eyes: the Shamanic Spirit in 20th Century Art*, Michael Tucker (1992: 43) describes an artist as a shaman, a person who can understand and see beyond the realm of the physical and also inspire others out of their regular daily routines and experiences. In this way the artist functions as a medium of sorts who brings forth a particular and unique understanding or vision. A common thread with all artists who incorporate the ineffable is their interest and search for an inspiration from places of the metaphysical and mystical as well as from own experiences in life that they cannot fully understand. Roger Lipsey (1988: 10) similarly highlights the link between art and awareness in his book *An Art of Our Own, The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art* and approaches the topic by posing two questions. Firstly, "What is the spiritual?" and secondly, "What is the spiritual in art?" He responds to the first question by saying: "The spiritual is a dramatic shift in experience and an undoing of what we

take to be ourselves" and "[...] an incursion from above or deep within to which the ordinary human being in each of us can only surrender." He responds to the second question by speaking about the role of art in 'preindustrial' cultures as one of depicting the sacred and goes on to note: “The sacred is the realm of the larger truths surrounding and conditioning our lives or dwelling within; it is the realm of the hidden, and therefore of revelation" (Lipsey 1988: 12). [19]

This idea of revelation and of artistic transformation being one of bringing the invisible into visible form, is addressed by Haberkorn (2007: 1) when she notes that

> […] the individuation of the subtle and intuitive experience is the manifestation of the transformative moment when the visual artist knows what they have to do when unconscious thoughts synchronize to create a conscious idea (Anderson 1996: 72). To clarify and understand this moment requires a deepening beyond the sensory. What is the precipitating moment that becomes a catalyst of influence when the invisible unites with the visible and becomes part of the comprehensive plan that impels the development of the contemporary artist’s image and meaning (Collier 1972).

Haberkorn (2007: 4) goes on to examine the “transformative event” of the visual artist’s concept development and how it enables him/her to narratively represent the invisible. Observations such as Haberkorn’s will be useful to my examination of the two artists’ works and will throw some light onto their particular engagements with the “relationship between visual manifestation of the visible and the invocation of the invisible” which Nel and Kapoor deal with in different ways.

In a similar way in which anthroposophy, alchemy and shamanism drove Joseph Beuys’ art making as a transformative practice, Kapoor and Nel can be seen to draw inspiration, directly and indirectly, from ancient and modern, Eastern and Western forms of spirituality. The mindfulness and self-awareness encouraged in such forms of spirituality can be seen to inform their creative work and a direct connection between observations, thoughts and experiences and the outward manifestation of the artwork

[19] Roger Lipsey is an art historian, editor and author who has written widely on topics in culture and spirituality. He is also director of the Society for Myth and Tradition and the publisher of Parabola magazine. He obtained his MA (1966) and PhD (1975) from New York University (www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Roger-Lipsey.aspx).

can be seen to be expressed in their works. Spiritual rituals and teachings direct one to an inward focus that enables one to be guided through intuition and then allows one to express what one feels, thinks and observes; this is also what their artworks can be seen to engender and it may be true to say that: "For them, art is more than just an object or process – it is a vehicle transforming human awareness through actions echoing religious ritual" (n.a. 2012: 1). Expanding on this idea, Robert Wuthnow (2003: 268) connects creativity and spirituality when he says the following:

> As artist after artist attests, creativity is the capacity to see and think about things in innovative ways. It ultimately reflects the person's entire being. This is why many artists insist that creativity and spirituality are virtually indistinguishable. And if this view is overstated, it at least suggests that it is especially helpful to understand why creativity is an important aspect of spiritual life [...][20]

Lipsey (1988) argues that spirituality is evident in the world of art and in human beings as an 'awareness.' In philosophy and religion, the ineffable is often linked, for example, to the ecstasy felt by saints when they reach a certain level of spiritual awareness. This kind of awareness can be cultivated in the arts. Kapoor and Nel can be seen to work directly with such an 'awareness' in recreating certain experiences that are available to the public through their artwork. According to many cultures and beliefs and in many artists' works, the aim of creating an immersive experience is to allow one's awareness to become more acute. Nel's works are based on his interest in the insights of various world philosophies, specifically on the reconciliation of dualities, which he makes manifest in his artworks. Ideas derived from Zen Buddhism, for example, in attempting to understand the world and nature of reality, underscore much of his thinking.

Kapoor, too, has embraced the Buddhist practice and method of psychoanalysis for over fifteen years and states that he works a lot with the notion of darkness. Yet interestingly, light is so significant to experiencing his sculptures. As he puts it:

> I've made works over the years that deal with that internal darkness. The whole of Western philosophy is based on the idea that Plato sat in the cave, metaphorically, looked up to the light and said "let there be progress" (Kapoor in conversation with Marcello Dantas 2006/2007: n.p).

[20] Robert Wuthnow is an American sociologist who is widely known for his work in the sociology of religion. He teaches in the Department of Sociology at Princeton University, NJ (sociology.princeton.edu).

Nel also embraces the concept of 'darkness' and it's potential, as is evident in his 2008 exhibition held at Art First Contemporary Gallery in London titled *The Brilliance of Darkness*. He notes:

> It is only within the all-encompassing darkness that we are able to see light, acutely observe, record and attempt to comprehend the singularity of the briefest instant at the very beginning of our universe and an ever-expanding consciousness (Nel 2008: 6).

The reconciliation or embracing of duality of light and dark, physically and metaphorically, in the works of both Nel and Kapoor will be further examined.

Haberkorn (2007: 2) notes that artists' alignment with philosophical sources such as Buddhism "speaks directly to a theoretical understanding of the mystical realm called the invisible. This realm is a critical wellspring for the visual artist's creative process and the delivery of meaning through their art." In Buddhist doctrine one of the main goals is to reach a state of equanimity through meditation, developing conscious thought and action. The aim is to attain the temperament that arises from realizing oneness; a clarity within. Whilst moving towards this equanimity, there is an awareness of the dualities as well as the non-duality within one's self; the process can be likened to experiencing turmoil or conflict (duality) before the understanding (non-duality). Both Kapoor and Nel refer to and express this idea of duality and non-duality, which can be described as a way towards encountering the ineffable. Kapoor engenders it in his sculptural forms and installations that often seem to embody absence and Nel refers to expansive space within one's mind, for example, in his works from the Brilliance of Darkness exhibition. The exploration of space, both in the sense of the experience of actual, physical space as well as a preoccupation with an 'inner,' meditative space, will be examined in their works in the following chapters.

The notion of space has itself undergone a great deal of rethinking in recent decades. Yoon (2010: 67) mentions the poet Rainer Maria Rilke who spoke of "the 'cosmic inner space' that 'extends through all beings'; a curious metaphor, since we usually think of space as surrounding things and not as extending through them; however, it is the latter concept that has been confirmed by modern physics." The notion of 'fluid space' has

been expressed in recent years by researchers such as Annemarie Mol and John Law (1994) and anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011: 86) explains it as follows:

> In fluid space there are no well-defined objects or entities. There are rather substances that flow, mix and mutate, sometimes congealing into more or less ephemeral forms that can nevertheless dissolve or re-form without breach of continuity (ibid: 659-664). Every line – every relation – in fluid space is a path of flow, like the riverbed or the veins and capillaries of the body. As the sanguinary image suggests, the living organism is not just one but a whole bundle of lines. In a quite material sense, lines are what organisms are made of.

The use of space is a significant characteristic to be explored in my examination of the ineffable. Notions of void, nothingness, time and space and how these link to experiences such as "fear, awe, uncanny, overpowering (majestas), and also combining Energy or Urgency" are important elements in investigating how contemporary artists explore and reveal the ineffable (Yoon 2010: 69).

Commenting on the role of the artist working with space as a means of creating meaning, Kapoor (1998: n.p.) asks the following question:

> Is it my role as an artist to say something, to express, to be expressive? I think it's my role as an artist to bring to expression, it's not my role to be expressive. I've got nothing particular to say, I don't have any message to give anyone. But it is my role to bring to expression, let's say, to define means that allow phenomenological and other perceptions which one might use, one might work with, and then move towards a poetic existence.

The "poetic existence" that Kapoor refers to relates to a certain contemplative awareness that one may begin to live with continuously. As such, his goal can be understood as 'spiritual' as it deals with 'awareness' in Lipsey's sense and relates to what Tucker sees as the "task of the shaman," namely "to bring healing and meaning into life; and to create a glowing sense of accord with the informing root of all being.[21] The modern shamanic path consists in a creative and affirmative relationship to life" (Tucker 1992: 20). In pre-industrial societies art was always linked to the sacred; it had

[21] Professor Michael Tucker was curator and teacher at the Brighton College of Arts and Humanities from the mid-1980s before he retired in 2012. His academic background was in the cross-disciplinary history of ideas, with an emphasis on nineteenth and twentieth century studies. His interests also focused on the idea of shamanism as a means of revisioning the critical import and creative potential of the arts (arts.brighton.ac.uk).

its place in the community as such. Artisans who designed carvings for Hindu temples or those who created paintings for churches in Europe to enhance the visual beauty of such sacred spaces maintained a close connection to their communities.

In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky emphasizes the value of the experience created by an artwork in reflecting aspects of the society in which it is created. His text acknowledges the need for a deeper understanding and incorporation of spirituality in art and life. In this vein, spirituality, in the present, refers to a need for greater compassion, integrity and human values amongst people. Lipsey (1988: 10) expands on this when he says:

> A pilgrim's way of life includes undeniable moments of peace and beauty but also suffering. Because most of us are marginally suited to the enterprise, pilgrims often experience themselves as burdened, resistant creatures, poorly made for a life of spiritual travel, donkeys on a path meant for a more gifted sort of creature. That is an image, another form of doubt. In spite of everything, some pilgrims continue - artists among them.

Kapoor refers to an artist as someone who, as much as he or she is self-aware, is still searching for a 'truth': "the truth that the artist looks for comes from the interaction between the process of making and the meanings that arrive out of that process" (Kapoor in conversation with Marcello Dantas 2006/2007: n.p.). He further notes: "not having anything to say" is related to "not knowing" and when one "fall[s] into doing [...] let that be the first sign of knowing" (http://www.anishkapoor.com/880/The-Institute-of-Psychoanalysis-2010.html). In saying this, Kapoor is acknowledging the difference between intellectual understanding and an understanding that comes from experience and action.[22] He places an emphasis on "the idea of the immaterial becoming an object" through a process of 'doing' and its connection to experience (Kapoor in conversation with Marcello Dantas 2006/2007: n.p.)

Kapoor thus emphasises that the artist's way is through the practice of physical 'doing.' By using artwork as a means of expressing philosophical thought and experience

[22] Kapoor is, however, quite cautious about making direct connections to mysticism. In a 1990 interview with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton on his work, Kapoor speaks about the relationship between the man-made and the celestial but also notes that "one has to lay aside mysticism; that is something which is a private world; one doesn't wear it on one's sleeve. What is important however, is the idea that the works are manifestations, signs of a state of being" (Kapoor cited in Morley 2010: 92).

through the act of ‘doing,’ many complex layers are brought into the creative act such as the intuitive, the emotive, physical movement and the understanding of the subjectivity of the artist’s own point of view (sight) and expression. In the following chapter I focus more closely on Anish Kapoor’s creative work and his process of ‘doing’ to throw some light on how he can be seen to engage with the idea of the ineffable.

Chapter Two: Anish Kapoor

Object/Non-object, Material/Immaterial and Phenomenal Presence

Expressing the inexpressible is a challenging feat that Kapoor comments on as follows in an interview:

> Just as you can't set out to make something beautiful, you can't set out to make something spiritual. What you can do is recognize that it may be there. It normally has something to do with not having too much to say. There seems to be a space for the viewer, and it is something we identify as being spiritual. And it is all about space (2010: n.p.). [23]

As stated in the introduction, Kapoor's work has a very strong link to the experience of the ineffable and embodies or creates the experience of the ineffable in a very specific way. This link will be discussed in relation to the various elements used by Kapoor to create such an experience. The elements are the physicality of the work, the process of creating it, the notion of space and how his concept and experience of space is relayed through his work.

Sir Anish Kapoor (b.1954) is an Indian-born artist who moved to London in the early 1970s to study art at the Hornsey College of Art in London and then furthered his studies at the Chelsea School of Art and Design. His Jewish, Iraqi and Indian family backgrounds situate him in an interesting cultural and religious context. In spite of the urge from the art world in London during the 1980s to label him as an artist from a non-western country, Kapoor has been able to bypass the limitations of such national, religious and cultural identity ascriptions. In this respect, Nancy Adajania describes Anish Kapoor as "one of the earliest artists to make the transition from a postcolonial to a transcultural position." In making this transition, Kapoor does not deny his sources of inspiration nor limits the use of the materials he uses, but transforms them as he continues to pursue his individual interest. This aspect of transformation is evident in what can be termed his 'pigment' works that he created in the early 1980s (http://anishkapoor.com/459/The-Mind-Viewing-Itself-by-Nancy-Adajania.html).

[23] In a youtube interview on the work of Anish Kapoor, art critic and author Sandy Nairne comments that whereas Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth are well known for making holes in their sculptures, Anish Kapoor can be said to make space in his sculptures (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLKw5amIASY, January 22 2010).

The work titled *Mother as a Mountain* (1985) (Figure 2) is an example of one of these pigment works. This sculpture, constructed of wood, gesso and pigment, is made in the form of a geometrically shaped mountain covered in red powered pigment. The sides of the mountain shape are intricately fluted and with a vertical cut down its side creating two ovoid openings it alludes strongly to the uterine cavity. As Gianni Mercurio and Demetrio Paparoni (2011: v) suggest, the title of *Mother as a Mountain* thus

> […] explains the man-nature unity and the idea that anything that makes a womb, inasmuch as a place of origins, has a cosmic or metaphysical significance. The image of the mountain as maternal womb and of the vertical cut as the door to the body has its counterpart in *L'Origine du Monde* (2004), an oval shape that at times is perceived as a deep cavity, at times as a protuberance, and at others as a flat silhouette. Giving this work the same given by Gustave Courbet to his famous painting takes us back again to the body, not to bring it visually into focus, but rather to emphasize its mysteries.

The *Mother as a Mountain* sculpture, with dimensions of 140 x 275 x 105cm, is displayed directly on the ground and the dusting of the red pigment on the mountain is intentionally allowed to spill over onto the floor at the base of the form. The use of bright colour, particularly red, is distinctive to Indian culture and Kapoor explains that his interest in red is "dictated by the ritualistic potential of this colour, which expresses both a sense of life and a sense of death […] In my work the meaning of beauty and of death are reconciled" (Mercurio and Paparoni 2011: viii).

In their catalogue essay *"The Turning Point of Sculpture"*, Mercurio and Paparoni (2011: v) comment as follows on Kapoor's early pigment works: "What is particularly memorable for those who saw Anish Kapoor's first shows, in the early eighties, is the silence conveyed to the exhibition space by those small sculptures covered with yellow, red, black or blue pigments." They continue to say the following about these works and Kapoor's new way of understanding sculpture:

> Simply put, [Kapoor] believed there were archaic forms tied as much to the spiritual dimension as to the corporeal, which thus allows individuals to be reflected in them, and consequently to question or strengthen their own awareness. In other words, his sculpture was conceived of as a catalyst of energy, but also as a fragile body that could be injured merely by touching it. The colored pigments that covered them stimulated the desire to capture through touch what the eyes perceived and the mind could not fully

> understand. They possessed the very special sensuality of the ephemeral. Touching those sculptures meant violating them, getting your hands dirty, injuring them and being injured. And even though they were not anthropomorphic, they did contain a reference to the body, which in various ways is a constant of Kapoor's work (Mercurio and Paparoni 2011: v).

A significant aspect of the early pigment sculptures lies in the realization of what Kapoor refers to as a 'non-object'. Kapoor (2006: n.p.) says: "I am really interested in the 'non-object' or the 'non-material'. I have made objects in which things are not what they at first seem to be. A stone may lose its weight or a mirror object may so camouflage itself in its surroundings as to appear like a hole in space" (www.publicartfund.org/view/exhibitions/5775_sky_mirror). This concept of the non-object thus refers to a kind of object that only slowly reveals itself in relation to its environment. Many of Kapoor's works only become distinct in combination with their environment and Kapoor is noted in this context to have said: "I don't want to make sculpture about form – I wish to make sculpture about belief, or about passion, about experience that is outside material concern" (www.regenprojects.com/exhibitions/anish-kapoor3/press-release).

Of works such as the *Mother as a Mountain* sculpture Kapoor observes that they resemble 'icebergs' in the way in which their direct placement on the floor with pigment covering them thoroughly and evenly alludes to an invisible continuation of form below the ground. In other words, it is as if the tip of the iceberg had poked through the surface of the gallery floor. The perception of the 'invisible' form beneath or beyond the object is what compels Kapoor to explore the idea of the 'non-object' as an artwork. By painting the inside of a hollowed out spherical form with an intense hue of dark blue, as he did in the work titled *Mother as a Void* (1988) (Figure 3), for example, he created what he termed as the 'void object'. Sculpture has always been a focal point through which Kapoor has explored space in its infinite possibilities.

Mercurio and Paparoni (2011: vi) observe that "[t]he optical illusion that Kapoor gives to his works encourages us to scrutinize them inside and discover the potential of a space that, being empty and dark, is also a "non-space". By requiring a psychological reaction, the void and the darkness enable the perception of an inner dimension." Kapoor experimented with this approach to form and pigment in different ways for over

ten years in sculptures that "remind us that all the things we do always project us to the outside: we exist in relation to space and time (we exist insofar as we become)." As such, his sculptures also formally investigate "the phenomenology of space, the ways in which a subject relates to the external environment." Examples of these early pigment works include *Adam* (1988-1989), *Eyes Turning Inwards* (1993) and *Untitled* (1990).

After also working extensively with stone as sculptural medium in exploring the notion of an interior void within the density of the material, Kapoor chose to work with stainless steel objects that have highly reflective mirror surfaces. His mirrored objects are perhaps his most well known works as many of these artworks feature as permanent site-specific installations in various major cities. Examples of these are *Cloud Gate* (2004) in Chicago and *Sky Mirror* (2006) at Rockefeller Centre, New York. It has taken many years to perfect the seamlessly reflective surfaces of the mirror works. Made of forged stainless steel plates rolled by hand, plasma welded and then hand-polished to achieve a mirror-like surface, the sense of vertigo that is experienced when encountering these mirror works is both exhilarating and disconcerting. Some of his large-scale works are impossible to visually grasp in their entirety, even at a distance. The sheer expanse of them can be quite overwhelming in the way in which they disorient and reconfigure space. These aspects will be discussed in greater detail later on in my examination of the work *Vertigo* (2008). Apart from the mirrored objects, Kapoor has also recently worked on a large scale with cement extrusions (in an auto-generated process) and processes involving masses of red wax, together with drawings, digital prints and set design for opera. The final two works that I will be looking at, *Ascension* and *Descension*, explore the idea of the immaterial becoming an object through Kapoor's use of smoke and wind and swirling water, respectively.

There are subtleties to Kapoor's work that are challenging to grasp or to quantify intellectually. This is also evident in the many writings on his works that attempt to put words to such experiences of 'unknowing.' The state of 'not knowing' can be likened to an experience of the ineffable in not being able to fully express an experience, whether this may involve the experience of presence or absence. The idea of nothingness and an experience of the void; the shift in bodily and mental experience that leads to a different way of perceiving the material form of an artwork, will be examined in the works that I have selected to write about. While Kapoor's works usually involve simple forms that

are very accessible visually, the experiential dimension that he manages to fit into them makes for mysterious and complex artworks. They present the viewer with “mystical moments when things are different and when images seem intangible” and words that have been used in describing his works include: “beguiling, mercurial, puzzling and arresting” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPK306BJSgM, January 22, 2010).

Besides being Kapoor’s first body of artworks exploring these ideas of the intangible and mystical, the pigment works also mark and represent a very decisive time in his art career. As he himself notes:

> Whenever I have a difficulty, I always go back to the pigment pieces. I always look at them again. When I was making them, I felt more alive than I'd perhaps ever been in my life, in the sense that it was a daily invention. At that moment, I had no idea where they were coming from. It's as if something opened in me and these things were just pouring out – it was great, wonderful; it was terribly exciting (http://anishkapoor.com/191/In-conversation-with-Greg-Hilty-and-Andrea-Rose.html).

His pigment work titled *As if to Celebrate, I discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* (1981) (Figure 1) consists of a constellation of three sculptural forms displayed directly on the gallery floor. Two forms are covered in a bright, deep red pigment, with dimensions of 97 x 76,2 x 160cm and 33 x 71,1 x 81,3cm, and the smallest form is dusted in a warm, radiant yellow powder, measuring 21 x 15,3 x 47cm. Many of his first pigment works were made entirely from the solid pigment but this work involved a combination of wood, plaster and pigment to arrive at the geometrical forms. The largest form consists of three fluted, mountain-like peaks adjoined at their bases. The central peak is shorter and wider than the adjacent two, which are more attenuated but equal in size. The sharp edges of the fluting, running from the peaks to the base of the forms creates a very precise and tactile geometric surface. The second red form consists of two equally sized and connected round bowls with shallow holes. The shape is very smooth, apart from an edge that extends horizontally in the centre where the two bowls meet. It alludes to the feminine form through its soft and curved design. The yellow pigment form has been described as "lifted off the ground on a curved surface and with its triangular, boat-like appearance suggest[ing] a directional movement"(n.a. 1986: n.p).The first part of the title originates from a Haiku poem and the second from a

"Hindu myth of the Goddess, who was born out of a fiery mountain which was composed of the bodies of male god" (n.a. 1986: n.p)

A return visit to India in 1979 was an important event in Kapoor's realization of his mode of working towards these artworks. As he recounts:

> Then, in early 1979 I went to India […] and I suddenly realized all these things I had been making at art school and in my studio had a relationship to what I saw in India […] It was a certain attitude to the object. I was making objects that were about doing, about ritual. It was that 'doingness', that almost religious doing, that I saw everywhere […] It felt like a huge affirmation. (Higgins 2008: n.p.)

The 'doingness' as well as the steady and conscious method of applying the coloured powder to the forms was linked to the ritual aspect of working by way of intuition. The powder would be gently flicked onto the surface of the sculpture while the person applying it wore a pair of white gloves. The lightness of touch that the powder exudes and the presence of its 'overallness,' creates an aura around the work, seemingly extending the presence of the work beyond its physical dimensions.

In his book *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)*, Paul Crowther (2009 cited in Hawes 2010: 3) suggests that

> […] our intuitive sense of significance in the 'aesthetic' experience extends beyond the visual unities and harmonies of line or colour. The 'intrinsic significance of the image' lies in its capacity to manifest aspects that are fundamental to embodiment, perception, and space-occupancy. That is to say the image 'exemplifies' factors which are basic to our cognitive and metaphysical inherence of the world.

Crowther identifies the first of these factors in the artist's process of making. Hawes (2010: 3) takes Crowther's point further when he says that: "The created visual work displays many of the factors involved in its own physical and causal history and in so doing, directly exemplifies the dependence of present states of affairs and perceptual givens upon their past states, by preserving those states in the work's immediate 'phenomenal presence.'" This is significant in relation to the powdered pigment works by Kapoor in that we perceive them in a very heightened sense of being 'preserved' in their "phenomenal presence." They are objects whose surfaces are presented in a very

fragile and tenuous state that allows an access via vision alone; our touch would immediately disturb their perfection and integrity of surface.

The significance of the powder and bright colour does allude to Indian traditions and Hindu rituals, and while Kapoor resists the narrow interpretation of his works through his biography, he acknowledges the influences that inevitably contributed to his insights and artistic career. He comments:

> Red is a colour I've felt very strongly about. Maybe red is a very Indian colour, maybe it's one of those things that I grew up with and recognise at some other level. Of course, it is the colour of the interior of our bodies. Red is the centre (http://anishkapoor.com/180/In-conversation-with-John-Tusa.html).

Seeing red as "the centre" perhaps also underscores Kapoor's interest in notions of the 'beginning' or origin. He finds it fascinating that abstract art has the potential to somehow transport one back to an origin and has noted his interest in works by artists concerned with such ideas, for example Barnett Newman's abstract paintings with titles such as *In the Beginning*, or *Day1* (http://www.mca.com.au/events/anish-kapoor-ann-lewis-ao-contemporary-visual-arts/). Many mythologies about a beginning of the self and of the world are shrouded in symbolism and this kind of mystery also informs Kapoor's work. In retrospect, the mystical and very intriguing town of Rishikesh, next to Dehradun (where Kapoor attended school) must have had an impact on Kapoor's attitude towards mythology and form. Rishikesh is based at the foot of the Himalayas and the journey through the mountains, starting from Rishikesh and surrounding areas, is associated with many mythologies about the Shiva, the God of transformation, and many other Hindu Gods and Goddesses. It carries rich associations with the 'unseen' and what Kapoor terms "the inner life" (http://www.rolexmentorprotege.com/pairing/2010-2011/anish_kapoor_and_nicholas_hlobo) Exposure to such mythology would certainly have added to Kapoor's understanding of and emphasis on mythology. He explains that it is through our understanding of previous ideas and artworks that we come to read and perceive the present objects:

> […] there is a different poetic mood that you need to bring to the object, otherwise you can't see it. In other words, artists don't make objects, artists make mythologies, and it's through the mythologies that we read the object" (Kapoor 2008: n.p.).

These mythologies can lead us to a more expansive feeling of being, a process likened to Kapoor's method of 'emptying out' so that creativity may flow out of him. This method was assisted by Kapoor's many years of undergoing psychoanalysis. In a sense, mythologies are used as symbolic gateways to access a deeper level of wisdom and to access the numinous.

During a talk delivered at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, as a part of the Ernest Jones Lecture series in London in 2010, Kapoor discussed his pigment works and commented on how "form and colour could come together and create meaning" (http://anishkapoor.com/880/The-Institute-of-Psychoanalysis-2010.html). The unity of form and colour in his pigment works arises when one simultaneously experiences the colour as a solid structure and *as* a powder. The saturated colour provides an immediate point of access in being immediately rewarding and Kapoor uses the pigment in such a way that it accentuates the forms and their surrounding space both visually and in a tactile sense; one becomes very aware of space within and around the objects and of the presence of the objects themselves. He very clearly uses the material as a means to explore form and space but does not present the physical work as a finite statement (in this sense it can be understood as being a 'non-object'). His approach to space and sculpture is always expansive in spite of the very clear and finite forms. The manner in which the powder is applied to the forms with an 'absent hand' that remains invisible to the viewer conveys the impression of a self-created object. Some of these works do not have pigment spilt onto the floor at their bases, further implying untouched and perfectly formed objects with an immaculately applied surface. *The Chant of Blue* (1983) is such an example. The four forms that make up this work, two black, one neon blue and one half neon blue and half black, are displayed directly on the ground but without any pigment residue. The forms are organic yet also geometric and point to the binaries that Kapoor's later works embody: the softness of the coloured pigment contrasting against the hard-edged and otherwise clearly defined forms. This work also speaks to the ineffable in its implied link to the realm of mythology and symbols. Kapoor uses his forms in a symbolic way as a portal for a wider understanding. In this

sense he has created a mythology of space by bringing the viewer's attention to abstract forms that are filled with a depth of presence as well as the subtleties of history, culture and mythology.

Vertigo (2008) (Figure 4) is one of Kapoor's well-known and widely exhibited reflective stainless steel mirror works. The polished stainless steel sculpture has dimensions of 218,5 (h) x 464 (l) x 101,6 (w) cm and is a curved rectangular form with clear-cut edges, much like a large free-standing screen. The curved form is symmetrical, smooth and elegant as it stands in a gallery space that is large enough to allow viewers to engage with the work from a distance as well as up close. The work offers intriguingly distorted reflections in the curving sides. When one is up close, one's image is enlarged in a disproportionate way, and when one stands away at a certain distance, one's reflection is turned upside down, not unlike looking into a metal spoon. This results in a strange combination of reflections when there are many people in the room; an experience of vertigo occurs when viewing the inverted reflections coinciding with another's enlarged image. The other side of the work extends an illusion of space with standard reflection. This work with its seamlessly reflective feature comes alive when it completely envelopes or absorbs it's surroundings. It creates a certain sense of visual camouflage in the space, yet the unusual reflections also introduce a zone of uncertainty in the space. In many exhibition venues, *Vertigo* is presented in an indoor gallery setting with muted colours of white, grey and black. However, the work was also displayed outdoors at the "Leeum Samsung Museum" in Seoul, Korea in 2013 where it reflected the buildings, garden, sky and other artworks displayed in the vicinity. The colours in the surroundings and the changing weather (it had snowed) allowed for quite a different perception of the mirror work than when it was displayed indoors. The work seemed to continually change under shifting light conditions.

The surface or 'skin' of the sculpture is the most important aspect of such a mirror work: "the object has to be made well enough. If you see the surface, then you lose the point" (http://anishkapoor.com/288/Mehboob-Studios-2010–2011.html). Kapoor has often said that these mirror works take over 5 years to perfect the surface and create the reflections that would best embody his intentions. The way in which the works stand, half present, half absent, embodies his process of creating the void, or entering into the unknown space. Kapoor refers to the unknown as the internal place where his creativity

is continually revived. (http://www.rolexmentorprotege.com/pairing/2010-2011/anish_kapoor_and_nicholas_hlobo). The properties of uncertainty and the presentation of space in *Vertigo* is what lures the viewer into experiencing a sense of the ineffable. As the work semi-dissolves into the space, the viewer is presented with an entirely disconcerting sensation of being – one that prompts an internal jolt to one's perception. One has the experience of being both inside and outside the work and this creates an element of being 'on-edge' in an emotionally affective way. The experiential element also produces time as a continuum in the viewing of the work (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLKw5amIASY, January 22, 2010).

The mirror, as a material, is embedded in many thousands of years of connotations of reflection, self-reflection, sight, bodily mediations and space and these aspects clearly come to the fore in Kapoor's use thereof. Kapoor notes that the majority of mirrors he uses are convex because of the direct, straightforward reflection they provide. Concave mirrors are not often used as they do not extend space in the expected sense but create a depth of space within the material that often distorts its reflection. The use of the mirror helped Kapoor to expand his interest in and experience of the 'void object' by enabling him to present the void as something not separate from the viewer, as in the case of *Vertigo*, but as a space that the viewer becomes immersed in when confronting the work. By choosing the stainless steel mirror surface as his medium, Kapoor is able to access a very primary visual/bodily-instinctive experience conveyed through the immediate reflection in the mirror as opposed to a secondary mental-analytical approach. To quote Lyotard (2013: 123): "it constitutes feeling, meaning before the mind. In this philosophy, we have only feeling to guide us toward form, of which it is the 'reason' [...]"

Some of Kapoor's mirror works are quite intimate in form and scale while others are very bold and grand in size. He says of his curved mirror surface sculptures:

> The concave objects don't do anything about the camouflage, they actually hold the space. And the reason why it's hard on your eyes is because it's an activated space. It's as if you are entering a certain part of the object. Sculptures add to a space but this adds to make a problem with the space that you are interacting with (http://saharzaman.com/upload/1291711410Sahar%20Zaman%20speaks%20to%20Anish%20Kapoor.pdf).

His works seem to have become more engaged with the immersive as he has found new mediums to explore. Space becomes 'activated' in that the viewer sees a clear reflection of him/herself and is thereby fully ‘implicated’ in the work by his/her own presence. This direct confrontation of one's self disrupts physical certainty in presenting a sense of 'dissolution of being'. The notion of the sublime in the context of viewing artworks is usually understood in terms of an experience of space that one enters visually, i.e. one becomes visually immersed in a work of art through an illusion of depth created in a painting, for example. Yet in the case of Kapoor’s mirror work, the sublime experience is one that fully merges viewer and space. The viewer is no longer 'in front of the work' but rather experiences a sharing of the space of the 'sublime' (Bentley Hart 2003: 44).

The visual and bodily experience of vertigo is a powerful one, able to distort one's sense of control over space and time. Lyotard observes that artworks do not depict the present moment; they are a memory and always defer the viewer from the work by referencing a past moment or experience. This is true in a sense that the artwork is an embodiment of a presence that came about in the past: "[...] memory can accompany this presence, even before being sited, and without that of which it is the memory having had this presence. Perhaps presence is always memory [...]" (Lyotard 2013: 109). As much as Kapoor engages with illusion in art, he brings the viewer into the immediate present/presence of the artwork through the combination of visual, audible and bodily response. Interestingly, this heightened experience of presentness and presence in his work is often also perceived as absence, or as Homi Bhabha phrases it: the “Making of Emptiness” (the title of an essay that he wrote on Anish Kapoor (1998). This may relate to the duality of the void: experienced either as a void or filled with presence.

With reference to the Anish Kapoor exhibition displayed at the Royal Academy of Arts in London (2009), Wendy Anderson (2009: 12) describes the audio impact of *Vertigo* on the viewer: “If you make sounds in the centre of this sculpture, you will hear that the sound is changed by the sculpture’s curve and that the sculpture acts as a large acoustic speaker, affecting us bodily" (Anderson 2009: 12). Anderson refers to the acoustic mirrors built in the early decades of the twentieth century, mentioning an acoustic mirror built in Denge, a former English Royal Air-Force base on the south-coast of England, that almost identically resembles the shape of *Vertigo* (Figure 5). This acoustic mirror, built of stone and with dimensions of approximately 70m (w) by 5m (h), was

intended to detect early signs of incoming enemy airplanes during the times of war through the magnification of sound. Two other acoustic mirrors of circular shape, which also resemble a few of Kapoor's circular mirror works, are situated alongside the stone mirror resembling *Vertigo*. The mirrors were designed by Major William Sansome Tucker who contributed to the field of acoustic research. Though very accurate, these mirrors were abandoned when the method of attack, the development of faster airplanes, surpassed the ability to respond with sufficient defense. The invention of RADAR became the new method of detection and was supported by the notions Tucker had developed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5k7GqG3psM).

Apart from the link to the acoustic mirror, the material form of *Vertigo* does not include any national, cultural or religious references. However, there are works of Kapoor's that do carry specific references such as the circular mirror work *Sky Mirror* (2006) installed at the Rockefeller Centre, New York. Standing three stories high and weighing 23 tons, this circular mirror is angled upward with its concave side facing towards Rockefeller Plaza, reflecting an inverted image of the iconic skyscraper and the shifting sky around it. A spectator describes it as follows:

> Sky mirror brings the sky down to the ground. Its convex side, facing Fifth Avenue reflects a more earthly vision: viewers in the midst of the adjacent streetscape. This optical object changes through the day and night and is an example of what Kapoor describes as a 'non-object', a sculpture that, despite its monumentality, suggests a window or a void and often seems to vanish into its surroundings (www.publicartfund.org/view/exhibitions/5775_sky_mirror).

This work (and others) seem to resemble geometric forms in a collection of architectural astronomical instruments at the "Jantar Mantar" (Figure 6) observatory in Jaipur, India, an observatory that was built in the 18th century by Maharaj Jai Singh II who was the King of Jaipur. The Maharaj built 5 monuments during his rule and "Jantar Mantar" (meaning 'creating formulae') observatory is one of them. An observatory was built in each of the 5 different cities, all still existing today in various degrees of preservation, the observatory in Delhi having been declared a heritage site. The Maharaj was unhappy with the inadequate understanding of astronomy and designed the observatory to determine more accurate calculations of the phases of the moon, the distance of the sun and other planets in relation to earth and the better understanding of time and the

planets' orbits. Most of the instruments were constructed in marble and cement and are two or three times the height of an average human body. The instruments consist of triangular staircases that end at a certain point mid-air, many circular sundials and yantras as well as a marble dial that has been dug into the ground. The forms are very simple and bold in their design. The colours that remain on the instruments since they were made are shades of red, cream and brown. Some of the forms are a strange combination of lines and curves that have been planned and constructed with great precision. The giant sundial known as the "Samrat Yantra" (The Supreme Instrument) is one of the world's largest sundials, standing 27m tall. It is this circular structure and its angular positioning that most closely resembles Kapoor's circular mirror works, but some of the other structures also resemble some of Kapoor's void objects. Interestingly, models of the sundials and yantras out of a soft wax which clearly correlates with Kapoor's recent works in wax as well as smaller models of his large-scale sculptures.[24]

Beside the physical resemblance, the conceptual or experiential significance of this structure also bears similarity to Kapoor's work; it is clear that Kapoor derived inspiration from "Jantar Mantar." The forms are very simple and yet profound in their purpose. The physical objects give insight into what is not physically accessible and are portals that extend to outer space. Kapoor's work also reflects the sky and the void, albeit with a less scientific intention. The stairs which end a few metres above ground are very much linked to Kapoor's engagement with a sense of liminal space, where one's body is prevented from continuing into space yet in one's mind one can move beyond, i.e. the staircase ending in mid-air is limiting in the physical sense yet it prompts the mind to continue the journey upwards into the sky. The instruments present a link between the known and the unknown; a combination of limited (finite and physical) and limitless (infinite and metaphysical) space. Kapoor's work is scientific in construction

[24] In the earliest stages of design, a wax or wooden model of the proposed instrument may have been constructed, either by one of the astronomers, or even by the Maharaj Dhirija himself. (Johnson-Roehr, 2011:184). Further reference expressed as a footnote to the previous point: "Joseph Dubois, a European resident at Sawai Jai Singh's court in 1732 CE, claimed that the Maharaja Dhirija fabricated the wax model for what appears to have been the Samrat Yantra. The king then gave it to his workmen for full-scale construction. Vidhyadhar was also thought to possess particularly impressive model-making skills, so it is possible that he was responsible for modeling required by the Imarat Khana. Deb, 214; Raymond Mercier, "Account by Joseph Dubois of Astronomical Work under Jai Singh Sawa'I," Indian Journal of History of Science 28, no.2 (1993): 159, 162.". This was taken from The Spatialization of Knowledge and Power at the Observatories of Sawai Jai Singh II c. 1721-43 CE, a dissertation in completion for a PhD in Philosophy in Architecture at the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Illinois, USA by Susan N. Johnson-Roehr.

yet poetic in the resonances one experiences in one's interaction with it. 'Poetic' implies a sense of feeling and leans towards intuition rather than scientific analysis.

According to NASA, 95% of the universe consists of dark matter and energy (http://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy/). The scientific understanding of this percentage is that dark matter is not anti-matter but consists largely of the invisible and unknown. As it is often said, the prospect of the unknown is as exhilarating as it is fearful. It is apt that as one becomes aware of one's self and tries to fathom the 'great mystery of being' (http://anishkapoor.com/180/In-conversation-with-John-Tusa.html), space, inner and outer, becomes something that one explores as a way of understanding one's place in the universe. The exploration and awareness of space is clearly central to Kapoor's creative work and, as much as his interest has been in outer space, he has been very interested in the notion of inner darkness. His deep interest in caves, especially the "Elephanta Caves" in Mumbai, inspired him to explore inner darker spaces. The inner darkness is one that Kapoor has also faced through his process of psychoanalysis. As already noted, he finds it very important to create from and to access a place of 'not knowing'; it is about becoming more aware of one's mind and inner self.

In Zen Buddhist philosophy, apart from darkness being viewed with apprehension, fear or ignorance, there is also an emphasis on darkness as an infinite place of potential. Hoover (1980: 18) puts it as follows:

> As a modern Nagarjuna scholar has described sunyata, or emptiness, it is a positive sense of freedom, not a deprivation. This awareness of 'emptiness' is not a blank loss of consciousness, an inanimate space; rather, it is the cognition of daily life without the attachment to it. It is an awareness of distinct entities, of the self, of 'good' and 'bad' and other practical determinations; but it is aware of these as empty structures.

This idea can be seen to correlate with Kapoor's sculpture *Vertigo*, where the reflection of space creates an awareness of the inner expansion or movement of space. It is, in a sense, a portal to a new understanding or experiencing of space that one encounters through one's own involvement and movement in relation to the work. Kapoor speaks of such an experience in terms of "a journey to an object, place or site" and about daring

to go somewhere I don't know." As such, his works encourage us "to look with more curiosity at the world" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6ex45vAUPU, January 22, 2010).

In his previously mentioned essay on Kapoor's work titled *Making Emptiness*, Homi K. Bhabha (1998: n.p.) says that

> […] the presence of an object can render a space more empty than mere vacancy could ever envisage. This quality of an excessive, engendering emptiness is everywhere visible in his work. It is a process that he associates with the contrary, yet correlated, forces of withdrawal and disclosure, drawing in towards a depth that marks and makes a new surface.

During his talk at the "Samsung Museum of Art" in Seoul (2012), Kapoor described his studio space as the sole physical space in which he allows himself to expand his art practice and experiment with his new ideas (http://anishkapoor.com/906/Leeum%2C-Samsung-Museum-of-Art-2012–2013.html). It has become a place in which he grants himself the permission to "play and to open up in one's self" and to be "a hero or a victim, a man, woman or child and to play the operatic roles that are a part of our historical mythological history." This "important and difficult freedom" gives room for continuous experimentation with new ideas which is vital to an artist's work (Leeum, "Samsung Museum of Art" 2012–2013, 25th October–8th February, Seoul).[25] It is within this physical space of his studio that Kapoor explores an internal and often unknown space. As much as the works themselves go through almost five to six years of refinement, Anish Kapoor himself undergoes an internal process of refining his ideas from where they initially started. In this context Mercurio and Paparoni (2011: vi) comment that: "Kapoor has moved in a metaphysical conception that translates into the ability of sculpture to become one with space and generate silence around it."

This internalizing approach to making seems to be a very important aspect to Kapoor's way of working. He often says that as a man he has lots to say, but as an artist he has nothing to say. On being questioned about this he responded as follows: "It seems to me that there's another route in which the artist looks for content, which is different from

[25] Nicholas Hlobo, a prominent young South African artist, was selected as the protege for the "Rolex Mentorship Program" in 2010 which awarded him a mentorship with Anish Kapoor. Hlobo describes Kapoor's studio as a 'wonderland' in which the artist regards each visit to the studio as a discovery (http://www.rolexmentorprotege.com/pairing/2010-2011/anish_kapoor_and_nicholas_hlobo).

meaning. It may be abstract, but at a deeper level symbolic content is necessarily philosophical and often religious." He also comments about his work as sitting "between meaning and no meaning" and exploring "differences between physical and metaphysical experience" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqezaleAfdo). His work forces one to reflect upon one's self as there is quite often 'nothing' to look at or into, as for example in artworks that present the viewer with a dark cavity (e.g. in *L'Origin Du Monde* (2004)). When nothing is reflected back at the viewer, the viewer's attention is drawn into a void and then back onto him/herself.

The introspective nature of the works, the involution and reference to the inside of the object is one of the ways in which to interpret the void as it features in Kapoor's work. As Mercurio and Paparoni (2011: ix) note:

> Unlike what happened with the sculptures of the early years, the space has slowly moved to the inside of the sculpture itself, which therefore occupies ever increasing volumes and is darker in its belly. The hollow interior of the sculpture is in fact much brighter the smaller it is: a kilowatt of light can be blinding inside a small space, but leaves a very large space in semi-darkness. Once again, Kapoor's poetics embodies the unity of opposites: empty/full, dark/light, male/female, positive/negative, material. ephemeral. Becoming one with the earth that covers the long cylindrical sculpture in Milan metaphorically emphasizes a unitary conception of the world.

An engagement with the void has recurred through many of Kapoor's artworks and one of the most recent ones is titled *Descension* (2014).[26] Described as a 'formal continuation of the Descent into Limbo' (Galleria Continua San Gimignano Press Release 2015). *Descension* is a whirlpool of dark water driven by a motor inside a steel drum inserted into a gallery floor. The work, with dimensions of 260 × 320 × 320 cm, was first installed at the "Kochi-Muziris Biennale," *Whorled Explorations* (2014) in Fort Kochi, Kerala, India. A subsequent exhibition titled *Descension* presented at "Galleria Continua San Gimignano" in Italy opened on the 2nd of May, 2015 where the work was situated in the middle of a theatre with wooden floors and a stage in view. The "Kochi-Muziris Biennale" is the first biennale to be hosted in India and is Kapoor's

[26] Kapoor has previously worked with water in creating small whirlpools with smooth water surfaces, for example in *Turning Water Into Mirror Blood Into Sky* (2003). This work was created by using steel, water and a motor (173×300×300 cm) to create a circular dish-like object filled with water. The smoothness of the water surface created by using centrifugal force reflecting the sky in a similar manner to the mirror works. *Descension* is one of the first works in which Kapoor allows the waves and movement in the water to become more visible.

first site-specific installation to be made in his home country (Figure 7). This work was positioned close to a door and two windows that open up towards the ocean. The swirling movement of the black water created in the whirlpool is turbulent and spills over the sides onto the floor, leaving a damp ephemeral mark on the cream sand-coloured floor. The sound of the work is created by the water as well as the motor propulsion. A variety of other sounds enter the room from outside of the building. Once again, there is a reference to the duality through contrast between the brightness and calm of the view onto the ocean outside and the depth of darkness and ongoing turbulence created by *Descension*. The dual understanding of water in spatial terms as both serene and expansive as well as mysteriously deep, powerful and potentially dangerous is presented to the viewer.

The display of *Descension* (Figure 8) at Galleria Continua may be said to relay a somewhat different experience to the viewer in its altered setting. Being very contained within a closed, quiet space, the experience is more subdued, also owing to a slower, more gentle swirling motion of the water. The water level remains slightly beneath ground level and no water enters the physical space of the viewer. As one observes this work, the centre of the whirlpool continually changes as a 'white foam' within the water adds further visual richness. The motor sound occurs every few seconds and evokes a continuous breathing sensation beneath the water.

Kapoor references the photomontage *Leap into the Void* (1960) created by Yves Klein as an impetus for works engaged with the notion of the void, such as *Descension*. He acknowledges Klein's work as an important artwork in dealing with the significance of the void, yet he personally feels that a fuller engagement with the idea of the void demands an increased sense of danger, fear of the unknown or what one may potentially lose when entering a void (http://www.mca.com.au/events/anish-kapoor-ann-lewis-ao-contemporary-visual-arts/).[27] With this in mind, he created a work titled *Descent into Limbo* (1992), a dark circular hole created with stucco and concrete in the floor of a cuboid space with dimensions of 600×600×600cm. There is a story of a man who

[27] Yoon (2010: 64) notes: 'As Anish Kapoor has stated: "Yves Klein was the first artist of the avant-garde to mythologise the material with which he worked. He made it clear through his life and work that artists don't just make objects, they make mythologies" (quoted in Anon., 1995).'

encountered this work and, intrigued by the 'surface' or physical makeup of this hole, threw his pair of glasses inside, only to hear it reach an unknown bottom. The fear of not knowing the extent of the depth of the hole creates an unsettling sensation of experiencing the void (http://www.mca.com.au/events/anish-kapoor-ann-lewis-ao-contemporary-visual-arts/). *Descension* similarly explored this idea with the addition of water that introduces an element of movement and energy. The hypnotizing flow of water into an unknowable abyss creates a sense of descension as well as referencing the idea of a black hole into which all matter disappears. This work also "destabilizes our experience of the solidity of the ground we stand on" (Yoon 2015: n.p.).[28] The word 'descension' originates from the word 'descent', which, apart from describing a downward falling motion, is also linked to the word 'descendent' which denotes the tracing of one's nationality or culture to a point of origin. This is again pertinent to Kapoor's fascination with the idea of origin.

An earlier work titled *Ascension* (2003) realizes Kapoor's intention to reverse the process of an object becoming a non-object, i.e. the non-object becoming an object. In this work a constant column of smoke is created through a mechanism inside a base with a circular opening. By way of fans and a metal extractor nozzle situated several metres above the hole, a dancing column of vapour is formed and directed upwards to the ceiling. The white, misty column of fog slowly develops inside the base and is held and swayed in the air as it is drawn upwards into the extractor nozzle. This work was exhibited at "Galleria Continua" (2003), San Gimignano in Italy, at the "Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil" (2006-2007) in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, at the "Galleria Continua" (2007) in Beijing and finally at the "Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore" (2011) during the Venice Biennale.

The first exhibition space for this work at "Galleria Continua" (2003) in San Gimignano was an empty room with two curved white walls. The direction of the walls created a pathway for the viewer to walk towards the center of the room to where the column originates. This layout was similarly repeated at "Galleria Continua" in Beijing, China in 2007 (Figure 9). The empty space and clear white walls in both venues served to

[28] Yoon (2010: 123) notes: "To the people of the East, nature, especially in the form of water, holds an ambivalent fascination, which combines a sense of fear with spirituality."

enhance the focus on the vaporous column. The experience of the work was described in the following press release:

> A massive spiral pathway takes one through a sensorial experience that leads the witness from a low, half-shaded gate, through a darker and narrower corridor, to the final luminous opening. The claustrophobic feeling that can invade one's experience is suddenly denied by the revelation of ascending and ethereal apparition (Galleria Continua Beijing Press Release 2007: n.p.)

The experience of revelation is created through the unpredictable column that continually appears and disappears. The founder of the engineering firm "Aerotope", Chritopher Hornzee-Jones, has been working with Kapoor for the past ten years and it is their collaboration that has resulted in works such as *Cloudgate*, *Memory* and *Ascension*, to name a few. The dedicated team at "Aerotope" has persisted in achieving the goals Kapoor has set out for himself. Hornzee-Jones (2008: 2-3) describes the technical and symbolic aspect of *Ascension* as follows:

> *Ascension* requires conditions of air movement analogous to a natural tornado.The vortex forms when a strong suction, which is provided by a powerful remote extraction duct mounted in the ceiling, is combined with a slow, smooth rotation of the air in the space. In these conditions, the air begins to spin with increasing speed as it nears the center of the system where a hollow core forms, exactly analogous to the eye of a storm. The third essential technical element is the introduction of a small amount of artificial fog into the vortex, which is required to make the air movement visible.
>
> There is a subtle but crucial distinction between Kapoor's successful integration of a physical phenomenon in an art context and, for example, an exhibit in a public science center. Ascension does not seek to explain how a vortex works, but to communicate on spiritual and metaphorical levels. Despite, or perhaps because of, its unexpected placement in an interior space, Ascension's vortex is perceived as being entirely real, and in that sense the work is not theater.
>
> Its exact means of formation is intentionally left to the viewer's imagination, thereby implying the existence of a mythological cause behind its creation, which, however, remains unknown (Hornzee-Jones 2008: 2-3).

Even in viewing a video recording of *Ascension* on YouTube, exhibited in the apse of the "Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore" at the 2011 Venice Biennale (Figure 10), one can sense the experiential impact of the work, especially in the opulent and detailed

architecture of the basilica where the ghostliness of the column of white smoke in the spiritual context of a sacred architectural space carries strongly evocative associations. The column rises approximately 10m into the dome of the apse and the sheer scale of the immaterial column of fog illuminated by light filtering through the windows creates a mesmerizingly ethereal and luminous experience. Yoon's (2010: 40) description of luminosity as "either a quality belonging to a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness" seems apt in this instance.

This particular work draws on the intrigue one experiences when the invisible appears to take physical form. The realm of the unseen is vast and mysterious and one is not always certain of its relation to the visible world. This artwork embodies one instance of a bridging between the visible and invisible. As Mercurio and Paperoni (2011: vii) put it:

> *Ascension* (2003), for example, is a vortex of white smoke that by stretching upward makes the spiritual experience materialize, thereby giving shape to a presence made only of its breath. Long before this work, Kapoor said, 'Breathing connects you to the universe. Breathing is a way we recognize that something is alive. it's my mission to make objects that disappear and to make objects that breathe. Breathing is the vitality of being and is regulated by the laws of physiology; at the same time it is seemingly more ephemeral when tied to being.' In considering breathing, the intermediary that makes us one with the universe, Kapoor reasserts that sense of unity that runs through all of his work.

Kapoor himself refers to the column as being similar to what Moses may have encountered as the 'column of smoke, column of light' in the desert. This again highlights the spiritual significance of the etheric manifesting in the physical world. The context of the "Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore" certainly reinforces a particular reading of the work. This was the first time that the space had been used in such a way to invoke the numinous through an installed artwork. The convergence of the fields of art and the sacred in one space is testament to the dissolution of philosophical and cultural boundaries as Kapoor's work dissolves the subtler boundaries between artwork and viewer in the designated space; all is present in the same physical space. (http://www.anishkapoor.com/178/In-conversation-with-Marcello-Dantas.html)

In an essay titled "Grasping the Wind? Aesthetic Participation, between Cognition and Immersion," Madalina Diaconu (2013: 8) writes the following about *Ascension*:

> The transnational artist Anish Kapoor explains the installation as follows: "In my work, what is and what seems to be often become blurred. In *Ascension*, for example, what interests me is the idea of the immaterial becoming an object, which is exactly what happens in *Ascension*: the smoke becomes a column. Also present in this work is the idea of Moses following a column of smoke, a column of light, in the desert…" His work challenges the history of sculpture understood as the history of the non-material: "I am making works with the history of the non-material, between illusory and real, between mythology and ordinariness," declared the artist. And critics see in Kapoor's works "the predicament of two contradictory elements of modernism, the materiality of a work of art and its opposite, the ideal and the transcendental."

Diaconu (2013: 8) further notes that

> *Ascension* is not merely an installation to be looked at (and one should add, to be listened to), but to be contemplated in the sense of pondering or reflecting on the dream of modern art to make the invisible visible and sensible. In front of Ascension, the spectator cannot avoid the vague feeling that the winding column of air is more than a work of art but is a sign, an epiphany of transcendence, the materalization of the spirit, a kind of Jungian archetype that operates on a subconscious level. The ineffable column is not only hard to grasp physically but also conceptually: it moves between earth and heaven, material and immaterial, form and formlessness, and even – to speak with Kant – between phenomenon and neumenon […] Anish Kapoor succeeded in Ascension to create a mystery that is at the same time here and elsewhere, that manifests itself without delivering its essence, and reveals itself, remaining at the same time inaccessible, a sign without clear signification.

Diaconu's observations underline the ineffable character of *Ascension* in the way in which it "succeeds in grasping the wind by representing, reflecting and engaging with the wind" (2013: 1). Wind is not perceived as an object in front of the viewer, rather "the perceiving subject is the body itself, which is immersed within an environment and engages with the natural surroundings" (Diaconu 2013: 3). Alongside the significance of colour and form in Kapoor's artwork, the experience of space is crucial to Kapoor's work in his concern with the ineffable. Space as void and what that 'nothingness' presents to the viewer is what effectively relays experiences of what Kapoor also intends, namely to empty himself out so as to provide space for what has to unfold.

Perhaps it is this "emptying out" that allows for the ambiguity and variety of experience of the metaphysical in his work. It is in this unseen, internal space that the ineffable is present as a moment, or moments, that emerge as feelings or sensations. Just as Kapoor has indicated that there is essentially nothing very new in art, he says: "One can hardly make a move in the right context without calling up a whole series of mythological references that are already in our cultural pot" (http://anishkapoor.com/180/In-conversation-with-John-Tusa.html). This also relates to the notion of the ineffable, to the experience of the spiritual not being something new but something that has been revived in more accessible ways, means and circumstances. To quote Mercurio and Paperoni (2011: v):

> Simply put, he believed there were archaic forms tied as much to the spiritual dimension as to the corporeal, which thus allow individuals to be reflected in them, and consequently to question or strengthen their own awareness.

In an MA dissertation (Wits University, 2006) titled *Representations of Transcendence in the work of Anselm Kiefer and Anish Kapoor*, Stefanus Rademeyer focuses on common elements between the fields of art, spirituality and mathematics in Kapoor's artworks and includes the following illuminating quote (2006: 28)

> Nothingness is that which makes the disclosure of being(s) as such possible for our human existence [...] Nothingness not merely designates the conceptual opposite of beings but is an integral part of their essence. Nothingness is neither a negative nor is it a goal or an endpoint; rather, it is the innermost trembling of being itself (Heidegger quoted in Dallmayr 1992: 45)

This "innermost trembling of being" is what Kapoor's works afford the viewer (and himself) in deeply transformative moments of intimate awareness that reach beyond the rational.

Chapter Three: Karel Nel

Inner/Outer, Radiance/Darkness and the Mapping of Consciousness

> In a pre-millennial moment when our real spiritual consciousness is often as nourishing as fast food, Karel Nel's work seems somewhat anachronistic yet strangely confluent with current interest in the mystical far-left of physics (Smith 1999: n.p.).
>
> Karel Nel has been described as a 'cartographer of consciousness' [...] According to Scoville, "Karel has a unique ability to bring out the commonality between the aspirations of both artistic and scientific endeavors, a desire in each case for unification and distillation of diverse phenomena, together with an appreciation of beauty and elegance - physical as well as philosophical" (Scoville cited in Mullen Kreamer 2012: 325).
>
> Science nowadays is harnessed to conquer the outer space but saints have for ages concentrated on the conquest of the inner space within themselves (Sri Swami Vishwananda) (Personal communication, 20 February 2015).

Karel Nel is a preeminent South African artist and teacher. He completed his undergraduate degree in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 1977 and went on to obtain a post graduate diploma at Central St Martins, London (1978-79). Thereafter he completed a Masters in Fine Arts degree at the University of California, Berkeley, USA on a Fulbright scholarship (1988-89). Since his student years Nel has consistently created artwork that engages with materiality and is concerned with questions of being, transcendence, and the socio-cultural dimension. Drawing and mapping have always featured strongly in his artworks. Christine Mullen Kreamer (2012: 325) comments on his extensive career and the various fields that inform it as follows:

> […] throughout his career Nel has mapped the human journey, deriving artistic inspiration from diverse sources - natural materials from the landscapes through which he has traveled; the human values encoded in architecture and worlds of arts from around the globe, particularly Africa, Asia, and Oceania; and discussions with artists, scientists, and others. These form part of a lifetime of experiences that find creative expression in artworks that effectively bridge art and science.

Mullen Kreamer's points encapsulate Nel's diversity in approach to his creative research, his broad spectrum of interests and his various achievements. In the following chapter I will investigate how the experience of the ineffable is intricately woven into

his works on many different levels and how he articulates his materials, forms and ideas to evoke the ineffable.

Nel's diverse approaches to his visual research and his various interests culminate in artworks that bring in elements from often seemingly incompatible fields such as science and spirituality. The experience of the ineffable in Nel's work could be said to be grounded in his concerns of bridging dualities such as light and dark, science and art, nothingness and presence, material and the invisible, timelessness and memory. In the catalogue accompanying a recent exhibition of Nel's titled *Silent Thresholds*, Elizabeth Burroughs (2003: 5-7) describes Nel's artistic exploration as being concerned with "the threshold" and "crossing the limen" in order to shift from one mindset to another, or one state of awareness to another. She puts it as follows:

> From Nel's first exhibition the nature of perception has been central to his work: the threshold – between the inner and the outer; the seen and the unseen; deep space and inner space; the sacred and the profane – is intrinsic to his artistic exploration. These thresholds are frequently both physical and conceptual. They focus thought on the conundrum of how the act of crossing the limen results in a change of reality or the alteration of one mindset to another. Nel likens that instantaneous change of intensity, of consciousness, to the difference between sleep and sudden wakefulness or to walking through the carved portal of a Romanesque church into the numinous interior space. The change of state is instantaneous, intense, complete (2013: 5-7).

Nel's concerns can be seen to bring together the fields of science and spirituality in a way that is informed by the religious philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. The American physicist Fritjof Capra (1975: 19)[29] comments on these religious philosophies by saying: "Although these comprise a vast number of subtly interwoven spiritual disciplines and philosophical systems, the basic features of their world view are the same. This view is not limited to the East, but can be found to some degree in all mystically oriented philosophies." Nel's interest in science, spirituality and art forms from various cultures comes across in his works through his own use of symbolic imagery and his approach to materials and formal means in his artworks.

[29] Fritjof Capra, Austrian-born, now living in the United States of America, has been described as "scientist, educator, activist, and author" (http://www.fritjofcapra.net/about/). He is most well known for his book *The Tao of Physics* (first published in 1975) that draws out the similarities in concept and practice to the field of physics and Eastern mysticism. Nel had the privilege of attending his lectures while he studied at Berkeley.

Three key elements in Nel's art practice can be broadly identified as: time, symbols and material. Each of these elements can be seen to be deeply considered and embedded in his work and related activities; in his travels to various places across the world, in his collaborative projects, his collecting of artifacts as well as in his artworks. I will engage with these key elements in my discussion of Nel's art practice and will initially focus my examination on the following artworks from the *Silent Thresholds* exhibition (2013): *Radiance: The House Within* (2013) and *At the Threshold* (2013). I have chosen these works because they also reflect back on some of Nel's earlier concerns in works such as *Saw a Sound* (1988-1989), *Transmutation* (1983) and *The Sound of the Rod* (1989) in their preoccupation with (inner) awareness, (vast) experience and (expanded) consciousness. Later on I will also look at works that reflect on his participation in the "Cosmic Evolution Survey project" (COSMOS) and how his works exhibited in the *Brilliance of Darkness* (2008) exhibition grew out of this involvement. The works to be examined include: *Composing Darkness* (2008), *Stellar Calculus* (2008) and *Sound Syntax* (2008). Finally, I also briefly examine *Reflective Field* (2011) as an example of an installation-based work of Nel's which was shown on an exhibition titled *Water: The [Delicate] Thread of Life* held at the Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg in 2011.

In an essay on Nel's work Rory Doepel (1993: 16) notes: "Transformations occur when objects and works of art are placed in new contexts, meaning is modified through representation." This is a core idea underlying Nel's artwork as he constantly develops new contexts in which to examine his collection of artifacts and to bring in his knowledge of historical moments, people and his own life experiences into his creative work. Elizabeth Burroughs (2013: 5) similarly comments on an "instantaneous moment of change" that is generated by new presentation of meaning and juxtaposition in his works.

On viewing Nel's artworks one immediately becomes aware of a complex layering that is evoked through the imagery, composition, the titles of his works and the materials that he chooses to work with. Texts such as *Transforming Symbols* (1992) by Doepel and the *Life of Bone*, an exhibition catalogue (2011) edited by Elizabeth Burroughs, Joni Brenner and Karel Nel himself, provide valuable insight into Nel's concerns in "his quest to know our place in nature" (Johanson 2011: 108). These concerns emerge from a deep interest in wider existential questions addressed in the fields of visual arts,

archeology, anthropology, astronomy, philosophy and paleoanthropology, amongst others. Subtle clues in his artworks and accounts stemming from personal interactions with the artist (including my own) allow me to piece together how his interests and explorations inform his work that he has produced in Rivonia, the suburb in Johannesburg where he grew up and where he still resides and works in his studio today. The suburb of Rivonia is situated approximately a forty minute drive from an area known as the "Cradle of Humankind" from which the earliest hominids are believed to have originated. Nel (2012: 353) points to the importance of this locality in his work as follows:

> One thing you cannot change about yourself is the place where you are born. It inevitably and deeply affects your notion of self in a cultural and historical sense. For me, living and working on the edge of this Cradle of Humankind, it is possible to vividly imagine how our earliest ancestors lay on their backs, as I sometimes do, looking up into the radiant firmament of the southern hemisphere with a sense of awe, incomprehension, curiosity.

In his essay titled "The Cosmos and Africa: Balancing Data and the Poetics of Knowledge" published in the catalogue *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts* (2012), Nel explains the contexts of a number of his works as well as introducing the reader to his multidimensional art practice. Besides his connection to Rivonia and the proximity to the "Cradle of Humankind," Nel (2011: 124) also expresses his appreciation for "the privilege of knowing Philip Tobias, Ron Clarke and Donald Johanson, along with many other paleoanthropologists who have worked and visited this region." He goes on to note that such associations would not have been possible had he lived, for example, in the Cape. The "Cradle of Humankind," as a significant paleontological site of exploration, highlights the importance of time, the quest to discover the beginning of human evolution in nature and the cycles of life on earth. Nel's participation in the *Life of Bone* Exhibition displayed at the "Origins Centre" at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2011, is a testament to his passion and involvement with the archaeological, paleoanthropological and visual art history of South Africa. His works are in many ways a personal record of his journey alongside inspiring people and places throughout his life, and he elaborates on this as follows:

> All work, artistic and scientific, is to some extent driven by personal impulse. Most of my work is autobiographical. Many of my dust works, as

> in cultural ground, map my yearly travels between South Africa, London, New York and other more remote destinations. They are in some senses a diary and a meditation as well as a new form of landscape painting (Nel 2011: 123).

Oral history and the humble connections between human beings as well as their connection to the natural world are brought to the fore by Nel in his various artworks and, as Smith (1999: n.p.) suggests, this may seem somewhat anachronistic in comparison to the widely-used impersonal technological means through which knowledge and communication are transferred, accessed and conducted in the present day (http://www.artthrob.co.za/99oct/artbio.html).

The first artworks that I have chosen to examine are all drawings that were made in Nel's studio at his home using various earthen dusts, dry pigments and pastels on a white bonded fibre fabric. His studio, which features in each of these works, is a large, vaulted space with an arched ceiling that houses many of the artifacts and sacred objects that he has collected over the past few decades. His studio thus doubles up as a space of creativity as well as a depository and display area of collected objects. Burroughs (2013: 7) comments as follows on how he uses this space:

> ...[it] constantly alters according to the placement of a series of sculptural sacred objects collected on his travels through many cultures. These objects - such as the ceremonial bowls, including the long, slender platter from Lake Sentani, the Chinese hardwood chairs, the Zanzibari doors and the African slit drums - form a psychological topography of the world, created by the intersection of perception, insight and belief, and, together, give a glimpse of the complexity of the terrain created by the variety of consciousness itself.

The studio is core to Nel's practice, a place to which he always returns and the *Silent Thresholds* drawings, exhibited at the "Art First Gallery" in London (2013) exemplify his creative engagement with the notion of the studio. The drawings also reflect on Nel's early inspirations from the work by Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957) as well as his studio space which was bequeathed complete with its content to the French state a year before his death. The studio was reconstructed in front of the Pompidou Centre and is open to the public (Hurd 2000: 59).

There is a personal history prevalent in Nel's set of drawings that is conveyed through the artifacts that feature as subject matter and that hold symbolic value drawn from various cultures. The title of the exhibition foregrounds the notion of the 'threshold.' A threshold signifies a liminal space, an in-between area that is often uncertain but can at times become clearer through intuition. As Burroughs (2013: 5) states in her catalogue essay, the threshold can be both a "physical and conceptual" one. The physical threshold may be the entrance or exit to a space. It is defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2007: 3249) as "a sill of timber or stone forming the bottom of a doorway and crossed in entering a house or room; the entrance to a house, building, or room." Alternately, as in the case of what happens in Nel's studio space, it refers to: "A point of beginning or entry or the starting point to an experience or undertaking." In Nel's work it involves the symbolic and physical presence and placement of the various artifacts in his studio. Such a conceptual threshold is thus focused on the experiential dimension relating to the mental, emotional or spiritual. The dictionary refers to it as: "A lower limit of some state, condition, or effect; the limit below which a stimulus is not perceptible or does not evoke a response; the magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested" (2007: 3249). Such definitions allude to a form of movement or shift. The inclusion of the word "Silent" in the title suggests a contemplative state in which one's awareness of one's surroundings, one's body and mind is enhanced. Nel's consideration of the space in which he works, the subject matter and how he maps each composition draws the viewer into a still and contemplative mood. Burroughs (2013: 5) underscores this in opening her essay with the following comment: "In *Silent Thresholds* Nel returns to the quiet process of looking inwards, the philosophical act of contemplation, of finding, tracking and engaging again with the perceptual process of making meaning, mapping and shaping form in the confines of the studio."

The works in this exhibition are portals to a view of the studio space and what it contains. A certain aesthetic quality or 'aura' is created through the composition of colours, shades and shapes, i.e objects take on a certain quality through the way in which they have been composed and rendered. This 'aura' or sense of transformation of the objects rendered thus emanates from the aesthetic properties of the objects depicted and the way in which this has been carried out. These aesthetic objects can be said to take on 'aura' through or within experience, i.e through Nel's particular articulations in

his studio space and his artworks. In his book *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, Thomas Leddy (2012: 128) writes about aesthetic experience as experience of objects with aura and notes the following about the concept of aura:

> Although everybody experiences aura in a variety of manifestations, the concept of aura is difficult to define. Like most of the concepts covered in aesthetics, for example "beauty" and "art," it is doubtful that it can be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. That is, it is doubtful that it can be defined in the way "triangle" or "water" may be defined.

Leddy does, however, go on to attempt to give a broad definition of what he means by aura and how this concept may be useful in understanding the nature of aesthetic experience and aesthetic properties. He states the following:

> Aura is a phenomenological characteristic of an object experienced attended with pleasure or with some combination of pain and pleasure (as when we are fascinated with the ugly). Whether the pleasure or pain/pleasure that attends aura can really be distinguished from the aura itself I will leave open. A phenomenological characteristic of an object is not in the object as an external thing and is not merely the result of the physical character of the object. Phenomenological characteristics may be described by way of what Edmund Husserl called the phenomenological method. This requires bracketing considerations of the real objective or science-based nature of the object. To describe it phenomenologically we need to focus on the object-as-experienced. Nor is a phenomenological characteristic just something subjective or purely personal. For example, an object as-experienced can be shared by others. For example, two of us may see a particular act as morally wrong, and although the moral wrongness of this act is not something that can be determined by any scientific method, our seeing the act as immoral is not something purely personal or subjective. Thus the distinction between subjective and objective is bracketed (set aside, not thought about) in phenomenological description (Leddy 2012: 129).[30]

Leddy's definition is useful in pointing out how a kind of bracketing, or psychological distancing, of an object from practical concerns is emphasized when one experiences aura. This kind of "distancing through taking an aesthetic attitude in looking at" objects

[30] Leddy (2012: 129) further notes ""aura" will be associated in the minds of many with Walter Benjamin who spoke of the loss of aura in the age of mechanical reproduction. He thought of aura as having to do with unique existence and authenticity. That is, presence of the original carries with it an aura of authenticity. An original painting has an aura, on this view, that a copy or as photograph of that painting lacks." Leddy uses the term in a wider application, i.e., not as referring to the sense of authenticity possessed by an original.

can be seen to be carried out in the works of Nel's (in the sense of imaginative perception), as I will demonstrate further on (Leddy 2012: 130). Although an aesthetic attitude in Nel's work is certainly focused on formal properties of relations of lines and colours, it is also evident in his focus on the "symbolic or content-oriented aspects of the objects perceived insofar as they give an experience of aura" (Leddy 2012: 132). As Leddy goes on to say in characterizing 'aura':

> My first inclination is to say that when something has aura it is experienced as having heightened significance. When ordinarily perceived, a shadow is meaningless, but when perceived aesthetically it seems to have more meaning, to have an aura of significance […] Another way of describing aura is to say that when something has aura it seems to go beyond itself or be greater than itself. A beautiful man may have an aura in that he seems to extend beyond himself, to dominate his space phenomenologically […] When [an object/person] is seen as greater than or beyond itself it is seen as greater than itself ordinarily seen (2012: 132).

Nel's work titled *At the Threshold* (2013, 181 x 181cm) (Figure 11) depicts stone objects variously placed in a studio setting. Two large stone objects feature prominently, a low circular base and an asymmetrical block used as a plinth to support a vertically elongated abstract form reminiscent of Brancusi's highly refined marble sculptures. A semi-circular object leans against this plinth. A dark shadow between object and base creates one of the darkest areas in the drawing and the strong contrast conveys a sense of heaviness in the objects placed on the floor. Further circular blocks of stone are drawn in the right bottom corner of the drawing. A slightly angled wooden doorway arch features behind the objects. The view of the situated stones creates a sense of a 'pathway' leading towards the doorway. The reflective white of the tiled floor contrasts effectively against the marks that describe the roughly hewn surfaces of the stones and the grain of the wooden doorway. Tones of grays and browns are used throughout with only a hint of yellowish-green. The door is undoubtedly the threshold described in the title.

Another work titled *Radiance: House Within* (2013, 94 x 241cm) (Figure 12) is one of the larger drawings of the series and defines the spatial parameters of the studio through perspectival lines that jut strongly into the horizontally oriented image. The left wall of the studio occupies a large part of the composition with the vaulted arch receding towards the right. A small floating form of a house with an emerald green roof and

panels of lime-yellow, blue and pink appears mid-air to the left. Light patches of rubbed colour and subtle transparent shapes move across the surface, suggesting movement or energy within the space. A bright pink rectangular shape tilts at an angle towards the far end of the room. Radiating lines defined in lighter shades of grey suggest a light shining down onto the rectangle, although the light source is not clearly defined. Amidst slabs of what appear to be stone bases placed on the floor, ceremonial bowl and drum forms towards the right seem to be releasing a reddish and grey dust.

The studio represented in the image is not just a place containing objects and artworks but seems to be a testament to the energy embodied in the objects that flows between them and through the space. The emanations from the objects plus the subtle shapes moving across the surface hint at the idea of 'aura' as an atmosphere around things. Leddy (2012: 133) notes the following on this idea of aura:

> The word "aura" comes from the Greek for "breath" or "breeze," and therefore one of its meanings is "a subtle emanation or exhalation." It is also described as "a surrounding glow" which can be extended figuratively to the atmosphere around a person, thing or place. This notion of (metaphorical) breath or glow that emanates from, or at least surrounds, something fits the idea of that thing going beyond itself, hence the main reason I choose the term "aura" as defining aesthetic experience.[31]

Leddy (2012: 134) further says that: "Another way of describing aura is to say that when something has aura it seems more real, more alive […] there is more than meets the eye." This sense of vividness certainly comes across in Nel's work. The idea of aura is also closely associated with the notion of beauty, as Leddy continues:

[31] Leddy (2012: 132) distinguishes his phenomenological definition of aura from metaphysical aura in saying that: "I am not using "aura" to refer to what Theosophists believe they can see emanating from persons and things. Theosophist Rudolf Steiner wrote: "The color effects which the 'spiritual eye' can perceive raying out round the physical man and enveloping him like a cloud (somewhat egg-shaped) are called the HUMAN aura." Although I do not believe there are "spiritual eyes" or colour effects of this sort, I suspect this belief is based on experience of aura as I have defined it. That is, Theosophists are probably mistaking phenomenological aura for the metaphysical aura they think they see. Unlike its theosophical counterpart, phenomenological aura is not inconsistent with any laws of contemporary science."

> Beauty remains the paradigmatic aesthetic concept in the aura conception of aesthetic experience. That which is beautiful is said to “shimmer,” “sparkle,” “shine,” “glisten,” “illuminate,” and “gleam,” all of which are examples of the emanation characteristic of aura […] Things often have aura when they literally sparkle and shine, and even more often when they metaphysically do so (2012: 134-135).

The title *Radiance: House Within* itself suggests a sense of brightness and life that fills a space; the floating house may be a symbol for a feeling of home as an internal understanding of stability and belonging in the sense of ‘feeling at home’ in spite of continuous external change. As Burroughs puts it:

> The idea - the eidetic image - of the house focalises the deep sense of belonging to a specific place, yet Nel speaks of his 'home' as carried with him when he travels. It is as if this state of being, the house within, can be found and recognized in other places too - as in the plaited huts from Oceania, which he has previously drawn. So, while home has a physical location, it is simultaneously a state of being in the world, a capacity for connectedness. Such a capacity demands a constant reappraisal of one's place at home and in the society one lives in; further, it requires a consciousness about the country of one's origin, one's own connectedness to global issues, and ultimately to the questioning of our position within the universe itself (2013: 15).

The studio has always held its prominence as a core grounding space for Nel throughout his many years of travel. He elaborates as follows:

> Rietfontein Road is where I built my studio, and it’s the place of my upbringing. It is here that the formation of my broad interests in art, anthropology and the palaeosciences took root. Here is where, as a 16-year-old, I read *The Phenomenon of Men*, Teilhard de Chardin's sophisticated synthesis of the relationship between geology, paleoanthropology and spirituality: the book reflects his insights into the complexification of consciousness and its relationship to evolution, and in some way too, reflects his own complex mental biography (Nel 2011: 124).

This was the place and time where/when he expanded his knowledge and interests in these subjects and it was also the time when he first viewed photographs of Brancusi's work.

In her catalogue essay to *Silent Thresholds* Burroughs sees a narrative developing from the point during Nel's childhood when he first encountered Brancusi's work to the present time when Nel visually creates a merging of his studio with Brancusi's in the

work *A Moment Apart* (2013). This symbolism of including both studio spaces in one work is subtle yet poignant in the perception of a deep similarity in thought. Burroughs (2013: 7) points out how the body of work was conceived over decades and how it bears witness to Nel's numerous visits to Brancusi's studio in Paris:

> Brancusi's studio, a series of interlinked spaces, was both his home and workspace as well as an ideal setting for viewing his works. The physical presence and stark beauty of the objects creates an archaic yet futuristic ambiance which both amplifies the space itself and the objects. Their precise placement in relation to each other creates a complex spatial construct, which evokes a sacred, almost temple-like quality.

Brancusi worked in cement, metal and wood in creating pared down sculptural forms and is quoted as saying: "What my work is aiming at is, above all, realism: I pursue the inner, hidden reality, the very essence of objects in their own intrinsic fundamental nature; this is my only deep preoccupation" (http://www.theartstory.org/artist-brancusi-constantin.htm) His interest in the artworks and objects from African, Assyria and Egypt influenced many of his works and brought an awareness to the metaphysical function of an artwork, thereby presenting the essence of the work to whoever encountered or pondered upon it. When Brancusi states his interest in 'realism' being the 'inner, hidden reality' he acknowledges the reality which is often invisible and can only be accessed through one's intuition and perception.

Nel's use of his studio space bears a strong similarity to the way in which Brancusi used his – both artists house artifacts and sacred objects and draw inspiration from them. Apart from his consideration and use of space, Nel's collection of artifacts from regions in Africa, Asia and the Pacific embody his deep intrigue in the physical object embodying a purpose. The functionality of an 'art' or visual object is articulated when Burroughs writes of Nel's "[...] desire to transmute function into perfection of form" (2013: 9). This kind of perfection can be related to the medieval notion of "claritas," which can be translated as "splendour, radiance, or shining." Leddy (2012: 135) elaborates on this notion of 'claritas' as follows:

> Aquinas, for example, thought claritas was essential to beauty. "Shiny" may appear to be just an everyday aesthetic quality, but it has a profound relation to the more complex quality of beauty. I have previously discussed Hegel's special use of the term "shining." He even defined beauty as "the sensible shining of the idea." For him, the sensible in the artwork is elevated to pure

shining. The idea may also be applied to the everyday as when things are perceived with the eyes of an artist.

Nel's work titled *11 Impasse Ronsin* (Figure 14) refers to the physical address of Brancusi's studio in Paris. Brancusi had intended for his works to remain as they were curated within his original studio space (Figure 13), but this did not happen as the building housing it had to be demolished after Brancusi's death due to the poor conditions of the walls. Since 1957 there have been three re-constructions of the studio space to encapsulate the feeling of the original studio space. As one commentary puts it: "Judging from the numerous photographs of the space, most of them taken by the artist, as well as contemporary descriptions, Brancusi's studio must have possessed a captivating aura. Paul Morand compared the space to a Gothic cathedral of endless columns. For Man Ray, entering Brancusi's studio was like “penetrating into another world.” The studio was described as a sacred forest, an enchanted or mythical place where every object, even the tools, seemed to “vibrate with a supernatural presence” (Barthel 2006: 35). Brancusi's studio was one of the first, along with Marcel Duchamp, according to Nel, to integrate the studio space into the artist's work in a clear and public manner, and it was said that an installation in this manner would "foreground the importance of space itself as a medium in its own right" (Burroughs 2013: 9).

Barthel (2006: 43) notes that Brancusi's artwork was "not the sole referant of the studio's authenticity, but it is the only authentic record of Brancusi's studio that remains." This statement emphasizes the significance of the space in which the artworks were placed and also implies the potential of an object to generate a sense of space around itself. Nel's work *Parinirvana* (2013) is a tribute to the state in which Brancusi had passed on: "He was found dead with a globe of the world suspended above him, the object of his last contemplation. *Parinirvana* is thus a homage to the expansive nature of his thought and his lifelong focus on pure form" (Burroughs 2013: 13). This state of contemplation highlights Brancusi's meditation on his ideal or goal which Nel reveres by naming this work *Parinirvana*, a Buddhist term for a deceased person who has attained the state of nirvana. This work not only highlights the spiritual undertones embodied in Brancusi's last moments but also relays the power of a physical object to generate such intensity in one's mind and being. Nel, as a collector of artifacts, respects physical objects as holding the energies or being a conduit for greater understanding of culture, human nature and the spiritual. Many of Nel's collected artifacts derive from

pre-industrial societies that held an innate respect for the physical by way of it's links to the metaphysical.

As in Nel's studio, Brancusi's reconstructed studio space is filled with wooden, cement and stone works that range in height and shape. A particularly poignant visual element in Brancusi's studio is the *Endless Column* (1912) which has been continuously reworked. A website entry describes it as follows: “It consists of a single symmetrical element, a pair of truncated pyramids stuck together at their base, then repeated to produce a continuous rhythmic line. In replicating the same abstract shape, Brancusi emphasized its potential for vertical expansion—it was, he later said, a “column for infinity” (http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81729).

Burroughs (2013: 7) comments that:

> From the time Nel first visited the studio, he made sketches and notes in preparation for these drawings. The exhibition is thus an extended dialogue between Brancusi's studio and the consciousness which informs it, and Nel's own workspace and thinking.

This dialogue which extends across generations: "[...] eliminate[s] the concept of time and separateness" (Burroughs 2013: 15). Nel also reaches much further into the past to trace an origin - that of human beings as well as the nature of the cosmos. He seems to want to challenge a rigid linear time perspective and to rather observe it as a continuum - a harmony of the past, present and future in a single moment or instance. Such an understanding of time is experienced when observing historical moments reconfigured in his works where he presents his individual journeys alongside well-known monumental sites or events. This is particularly evident in his dust works which feature in the exhibitions: *Status of Dust* (2002-3), *The Brilliance of Darkness* (2008) and *Life of Bone* (2011). It is also evident in his drawings presented in the exhibition *The Significance of Absence: there but not there*, where, for example, he makes reference to Galileo's tomb and the place where cartographer and navigator Captain James Cook died. These works pay tribute to such historic luminaries and their significant contributions towards further understanding of this planet, its people and cultures as well as the surrounding vastness of outer space. As Burroughs (2011: 9) notes: "In creating these images, it is as if Nel himself begins to plot a map of sites where human thought takes a quantum leap and breaks through the barriers of obstructing thought."

Perception as something ineffable and intangible is a tool that Nel uses to further his investigation of human nature. Robin Hawes (2010: 5) elaborates on this sense of using perception as follows:

> Described in these terms then, perception is perhaps best seen as a kind of 'toolbox,' which each of us then uses to manufacture our own reality, and the work of an artist is not really about the making of paintings or objects at all, but in dealing with the state of our consciousness and the shape of our perceptions.

Burroughs seems to underscore this idea in her essay titled *Cartographer of consciousness: Karel Nel* (2011). A cartographer is one who has the ability to collate complex information and refigure it in an image, map or diagram. To map consciousness requires a deep understanding of the nature of consciousness itself as well as finding the appropriate means to bring it into tangible, visual form. In spite of the complexity of this task, it seems to be an apt description of what Nel carries out in his work. His depth of research and extensive travels have given him the insight to merge different disciplines and his artworks are a testament to the union and understanding of very different elements of consciousness.

Nel has always been interested in the 'interconnectedness of things,' as is evident in the following statement made by him in an interview with Daniel F. Whitman: (February 17, 2010):

> Over two decades, a central concern in my work has been an investigation into the interface between the seen and the unseen worlds, between knowledge and consciousness, recording and mapping, and between the disciplines of art and science (Nel, 2008: 8).

Nel's interest in science is particularly evident in his works produced between the years 1987 to 1989 such as *Parallel Worlds* (1987-89), *Circuit / Accelerator* (1988-89) and *The Sound of the Rod* (1989) which all relate to different scientific theories. Nel attended Berkley between the years of 1988 and 1989 and this expanded his interest through association with physicists who where present there at the time, Fritjof Capra, author of *The Tao of Physics*, being one amongst them.[32]

[32] Doepel (1993: 3) notes that the "Theory of Relativity" by Einstein and Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" also held great importance for Nel in that they both encapsulate an awareness of the transformational nature of science and opened up new dimensions for scientific evolution. In Fritjof

Nel has been able to find and express commonalities between science and art through his participation in the COSMOS (Cosmos Evolution Survey) amongst one hundred astrophysicists who set out to map out two-squared degrees of the universe. Nick Scoville (2008: n.p.), head of the COSMOS team, describes it as

> […] one of the most comprehensive astronomy projects ever undertaken. The project was initiated with the largest allocation of time ever on the Hubble Space Telescope (ten per cent of the time for two years) to obtain deep, high resolution images of galaxies and clusters of galaxies in a two degree square area of the sky.

Along with other telescopes named *Subara* (which was placed on a high point of a Hawaiian volcano) and *Chandra* (which was launched into space in 1999 to observe the energy of supernovas, black holes and quasars "invisible to the human eye") (http://m.space.com/18669-chandra-x-ray-observatory.html), many different galaxies were discovered in the process of this survey. The light evident in the images traces back millions of years and as Scoville (2008: 4), head of the COSMOS team, says: "The project studies the evolution of galaxies, galaxy clusters and dark matter structures over 75 per cent of the age of the universe." Considering the "75 per cent" age of the content, one is tracing the development of the universe in reverse through light years and energy waves emitted. The images from space have to go through a process of de-codification in order to make the data understandable.[33]

In her book titled *Picturing the Cosmos, Hubble Space Telescope Images and the Astronomical Sublime* (2012), Elizabeth Kessler (2012: 15) examines the link between science and art through the images taken and produced by the Hubble Space Telescope and considers the ability of such images to evoke a feeling of the sublime. She writes: "To produce the highly polished images for which the Hubble is famous, astronomers

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Capra's The Tao of Physics the links between modern science and eastern mysticism are articulated as follows: "The exploration of the atomic and subatomic world in the twentieth century has revealed an unsuspected limitation of classical ideas, and has necessitated a radical revision of many of our basic concepts. The concept of matter in subatomic physics, for example, is totally different from the traditional idea of a material substance in classical physics. The same is true for concepts like space, time, or cause and effect. These concepts, however, are fundamental to our outlook on the world around us and with their radical transformation our whole world view has begun to change. These changes, brought about by modern physics, have been widely discussed by physicists and by philosophers over the past decades, but very seldom has it been realized that they all seem to lead in the same direction, towards a view of the world which is very similar to the views held in Eastern mysticism" (Capra 1975: 17).

[33] Interestingly, the images received from the Hubble Space Telescope are initially black and white and have to go through a process through which astronomers assign colours to the different energy wavelengths and other symbols within the image.

must make a series of decisions that combine scientific interests with aesthetic concerns." This corresponds with Nel's quest in trying to unite the fields of art and science and to find a way of representing what one sees and feels when encountering the universe through highly magnified and sometimes undefinable images. Nel says himself that he has often grappled "[...] with the challenge to find a mode of representation that is at once defined and ambiguous" (Nel 2012: 356). After seeing the glimpses of the universe through the various technologies, how does one relay and represent the vastness, activity and mystery of the outer space in a physical object on earth?

The *Brilliance of Darkness* exhibition resulted from the time that he devoted to engaging with the scientific data gathered from the COSMOS project and reveals how he managed to translate it into poetic visual images. Reflecting on this engagement with the COSMOS project he says the following:

> Working with the COSMOS team has exposed, for me, the triviality of the human bound values that equate darkness with evil and lightness with good. Images now viewed from our telescopes were formed long before we emerged as a species and long before we constructed such values. Using the Hubble and Chandra satellite telescopes and many land based radio infra-red and x-ray telescopes, the COSMOS team has found that a mere two square degrees of darkness has revealed a million new galaxies as large as the galaxy in which our solar system exists (Nel 2008: n.p.).

The notion of darkness as being “revelatory, clear, all-encompassing” is what Nel is concerned with exploring in his work and he sees it as “the nurturing matrix of manifestation itself.” As he puts it, his series of works deals with “the reciprocal process of looking into darkness to see scattered stellar light, and looking at this light in an attempt to understand the darkness” (Nel 2008: 8).

Nel has chosen to present a complex network of thoughts and experiences in two-dimensional drawings using materials that hold deep significance, values and memory. He used 540 million year old carboniferous dust and prehistoric salt from an atomic testing site in White Sands, New Mexico, laquered wooden pegs, specularite, charcoal, vermillion, violet and sprayed pigment. Works such as *Stellar Calculus* (2008), *Composing Darkness* (2008) and *Sound Syntax* (2008) employ bold lines, shapes and limited use of colour to convey a distilled view of the universe. It allows the viewer to access depth of significance through the material and then to connect this to an imagined outer space. Just as it is a rare opportunity to be able to view the universe

through the advanced technology of stellar telescopes, it is equally rare to find and gather dust dating back 540 million years. Commenting on Nel's use of salts and dust in creating his works, Scoville (cited in Nel 2008: n.p.) notes:

> […] salts and dusts were expelled in the distant past from the brilliant stars we see lighting up the night sky. In fact, all the heavier atoms within our bodies were synthecized from the primordial hydrogen at millions of degrees, deep in the interiors of stars – a close parallel to the volcanic materials deployed in his other bodies of work. In this sense we share with the art of Karel Nel a common origin that is at once physical and symbolic.

The highly advanced technology used in scrutinizing the skies and the ancient substance of salt and dust found on earth equally access the notion of deep time as one contemplates outer space and historical palynological significance simultaneously. It is perhaps the union of these two realms, earth and sky - representing all of space in the universe - that evokes the ultimate ineffable experience.

In a work titled *Stellar Calculus* (2008, 170 x 170 cm) (Figure 15) Nel used the above-mentioned carboniferous dust and prehistoric salt on bonded fibre fabric to present a black and white diagramatic image of a quarter section of a circle with gridded pattern against a dark background that resembles a night sky filled with numerous star clusters. Two long rectangular black 'rods' or 'slats' feature diagonally across this diagramatic section of circle like the hands of a clock. The highly contrasted clarity of intersecting lines composing the gridded geometric pattern against the dark and misty elements of what seems to lie deep beyond suggests a rational, mathematical dissection of deep space using scientific tools. It creates a field that draws the viewer into a space of contemplation.

Composing Darkness (2008) (Figure 16) is another work that relates directly to Nel's perception of darkness within outer space. Nel's intention is to present darkness as something that we as human beings have to confront because of its overwhelming, unavoidable, unfathomable presence in relation to life on earth. It is one of the smaller works on the exhibition measuring 80 cm x 80 cm and is also made by using the black carboniferous dust and salt. Within the square format of the work another darker square appears tilted to suggest a field within a larger expanse. The lighter parts beyond the field of the square contain speckles of white that look like stars. The rich and

shimmering quality of the carboniferous dust conveys the experience of looking up at a night sky. In remote locations where such views of the stars are especially clear, Nel describes the experience of observing the firmament as follows: "As the light fades, one's eyes incrementally adjust to the powder-black darkness and the pinpoints of light emerge like a developing photograph, till the darkness is radiant with millions of visible stars" (Nel 2008: 8-9). He enlarges on this comment when he says:

> It is only within the all-encompassing darkness that we are able to see light, acutely observe, record and attempt to comprehend the singularity of the briefest instant at the very beginning of our universe and an ever-expanding consciousness (Nel 2008: n.p.).

What Nel describes is conveyed in the use of the dust in the central black square. The symmetry of the square and the adjacent triangles implies a steady movement or rotation; it is almost as if the light areas are moving around the dark square, not unlike the planets orbiting the sun. Lines and edges are defined but also slightly fuzzy due to the powdery nature of the medium - dust is not that easy to control in creating sharp edges. An ironic aspect in using dust as medium lies in its seeming insignificance, but it simultaneously speaks of the immensity of time and the evolution of nature. The 540 million year old carboniferous dust is awe-inspiring in the incomprehensibility of its age. Nel presents the viewer with the dark square in the centre perhaps in response to the fields of darkness that he encountered while through looking through the telescope. Darkness is one of the primary factors one encounters in the process of discovering new things about the universe and life on earth. It holds everything that one would want to know and hence Nel's reference to it as "the nurturing matrix of manifestation itself" (Nel 2008: 8). In his drawings it is symbolically implied through the darkness being made up of matter (dust). The dense materiality of the dark dust creates a sense of the richness of layers and minerals within the earth. The darkness that Nel refers to in this work may not only relate to outer space but also to the undiscovered elements on the planet and within ourselves.

Sound Syntax (2008) (Figure 17) is one of the few works in the exhibition that contains vermillion pigment. The intensity of the vermillion colour stands out strikingly in relation to the whites, blacks and grays used in other works. The 100 x 200 cm bonded fibre fabric is divided into two equal fields: the left side presents a dense field of

vermillion pigment while the right side is covered with the white salt used in the other works. Black cell-like forms of different sizes are scattered across both surfaces. The vermillion pigment contains a large black circular shape with a slight indentation on top. Approximately fourteen tiny raised black circles occupy the surrounding area. Four medium black circular shapes occupy the white field and appear slightly transparent or modelled as they include hints of white within their shapes. The surrounding space also holds tiny raised circles but the field appears much busier because of small amounts of black carboniferous dust having been rubbed into the salt to create shadowy effects. It seems to suggest a livelier relation between elements than in the starker vermillion pigment field.

The title *Sound Syntax* implies the composition of sound. The visual adjustment between the bigger and smaller shapes generates a flow or movement on the surface of the work that seems equivalent to different sound patterns or vibrations. The circles also resemble human blood cells when examined under a microscope, the material make-up of our own being. In deep astronomy imaging, scientists have to transform the light flickers detected by the Kebbler Space telescope into sound waves. Through the sound waves, or what is referred to as 'Stellar Noise,' they are able to determine the brightness and age of stars (http://m.space.com/18669-chandra-x-ray-observatory.html). Furthermore, the various levels of the data are recorded in various ways to accommodate for accurate understanding of what is occurring in space. There are thus many layers of information that have to be interpreted and then reinterpreted in order for scientists to comprehend the data. This continual process of reinterpretation is also familiar to the artist who engages reflexively and poetically with his chosen materials of dust, salt and pigment in presenting symbols consisting of shapes and colours that evoke complex and nuanced structures. Engaged with matter suspended in time, his works are expressive of the vastness of the cosmos and lead us to a deeper understanding of material as the basis of our own being.

"The shimmering refracting surfaces of the works evoke the evanescent phenomenon of photons traveling through deep space, here materialized into dense matter" (Nel 2008: 8). This phrase illustrates Nel's preoccupation with exploring both the unseen and seen, the physical and metaphysical. On both a perceptual and conceptual level Nel's artworks present the viewer with a very physical experience of something that is also very

abstract in nature. The photons that are invisible to the human eye 'merge and move' in the physical substance of the artworks, i.e. in the millions of carboniferous dust particles. Just as one cannot comprehend the vastness of the universe, one can also not fully grasp the vastness of the tiniest dust particles, i.e. a reciprocal macro and micro cosmos is implied. The capacity of the dust to form visible shapes on the surface of the bonded fibre fabric is similar to the way in which the Milky Way is seen as a whole but is in fact comprised of many smaller phenomena and galaxies. The softness and shimmer of the surfaces achieved by fixing the dust and salt to the vertical supports of the bonded fibre also creates tactile surfaces that directly confront the viewer in their materiality and it is through this materiality that he articulates complexities in response to scientific observations.

Nel (2009: 12) expands on his use of the data captured by the astronomers as follows:

> The team's images are relayed back from deep space, a range of radio, infrared and x-ray images, all below optical frequency. My resulting images are at times directly based on this material and at others, I attempt to create metaphorical images that distill the abstract nature of the deep field data that emerges. In some ways, the works emerge equally from a sense of comprehension and of incomprehension. My contribution adds another dimension to the data capture. My images attempt to record the experience of human perception of this new material, in contrast with the dispassionate and pure scientific viewing of it. While the images I produce appear abstract, they are deeply encoded, direct references to these scientific discoveries, and constitute new methods of data articulation. They strive to create visual equivalents for understanding these fugitive notions.

Nel further notes that many of the works associated with the COSMOS project "have their genesis in attempting to grasp the nature of light and the information encoded within it." The images of captured light data have enabled the scientists to

> […] detect, analyse and theorise the nature of space, distance, gravity and mass, and has led to the discovery of the invisible presence of dark matter and dark energy. These rays are affected by the extraordinary presence of these dense manifestations, leading to the bending and displacement of light known as 'lensing,' alerting us to the presence and forces of immense mass (Nel 2009: 14).

An extension of Nel's exploration of his experiences and observations from the COSMOS survey has manifested in a series of works that involve the use of water and

its properties of bending and refracting light, i.e. the phenomenon of 'lensing' referred to above. The installation titled *Trembling Field* (2009) (see Figure 18, identical to *Trembling Field* (2012) exhibited at *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts Exhibition* (2012)) was one of the first of these works and was installed at the "Circa Gallery," Johannesburg in 2009 on a shared exhibition with Willem Boshoff titled *Penelope and the Cosmos*. Made with steel, etched mirror, water and light, this work is described by Nel as "an oval elliptical stretch of water with a submerged dark mirror with an etched image of a morphed series of radio sources from the two square degrees" (Nel 2009: 20). A beam of light hits the reflective surfaces of the mirror and water obliquely and deflects onto the wall of the gallery. The rays of light are deflected through the water at two different angles and are affected by the disturbed or activated surface, leading to a "series of reflection events." Nel (2009: 20) continues:

> Soft pulsing arabesques of intense white and subtle coronas are mesmerizing in their unpredictable configurations of distorted light patterns. Vibratory patterns are affected by the parameter of the field and the nature of the conductive liquid matrix. The vibratory patterns seem almost to be corollaries of visual sound.

Nel chose the elliptical form of the container to allude to the elliptical fields of astronomical phenomena (e.g. the orbit of the planets around the sun) as well as the elliptical design of the human eye and optical lenses, but it also reflects the architectural space of the gallery, which is itself elliptical. The use of the elliptical shape is particularly symbolic of Nel's interest in representing and understanding time. As Nel (cited in Freschi (ed) 2009: 20) himself notes: "Ellipses are also often used in the calculations of special relativity, emission theory and the bending of space-time."

In using the natural element of water to introduce lensed and refracted light reflections into surrounding space in *Trembling Field*, Nel creates a work that becomes a visual metaphor for the fluid and ungraspable nature of outer space. A similar work titled *Reflective Field* (2011) (Figure 19) was installed as part of the *Water, the [Delicate] Thread of Life* group exhibition hosted by the "Standard Bank Gallery," Johannesburg in 2011 and again later on the *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts* exhibition held at the "National Museum of African Art," Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C. in 2012. For the Johannesburg exhibition the work was made specifically for the circular central space of the "Standard Bank Gallery"

> […] with its white curved ceiling that seems to float above this space. The circular white disc of the ceiling is a perfect surface for the double reflective fields generated by this new piece, and becomes integral to the work. Reflective Field consists of a four-metre shallow carbon silicate container, computer modelled and fabricated by an aircraft company" (Nel cited in Freschi (ed) 2011: 100).

The vessel was in the form of a rectangular, elongated trough filled with a ton of water and had the potential to be gently rocked. It had three curved surfaces and contained two trapezoid shaped mirrors "engraved with syncopated dots translated from the Red-Shift data from the two-degree-square field." Shafts of light deflected by these mirrors into two opposing fields featured on the oval form above. Nel (cited in Freschi (ed) 2011: 100-103) comments on the work as follows:

> Looking at the reflected light, what are we able to deduce about the source of the reflected, deflected and lensed light? What can be deduced from the interference patterns of the streams of light? The COSMOS project is essentially involved in the analysis of light, radio waves, infra-red and x-rays that are reflected, deflected and lensed. The abstractness of these forms of data capture and interpretation is in some ways a scientific form of divination. The ability to understand dark matter or dark energy is only by inference. Its gravitational field in space is made manifest through a phenomenon known as lensing where light waves are bent by the presence of anomalies in the gravitational field.

Nel further notes that his work often engages the interface between the seen and the unseen and between the manifest and the non-manifest

> […] in trying to deduce the complex nature of reality. Water in some southern African groups is used as a medium to reveal a level of consciousness beyond the purely visible. Water as the medium of divination links the febrile interface between the known and the unknown, between belief and knowledge (Nel cited in Freschi (ed) 2011: 103).

Using water with its feature of viewed and reflected reality Nel thus introduces the complexity of different perceptions of reality becoming visible, or invisible, at different times. The vessel form takes the "iconic shape of a book or open text: a primary site for learning, reading, knowing and discovering; a form that contains

information from which to extrapolate, extend, challenge and reformulate" (Nel cited in Freschi (ed) 2011: 103). [34]

The water-based works discussed above are indicative of Nel's ability to translate a sense of the ungraspable in material form. Just as he is aware of unfathomable nature of outer space, he is equally intrigued by the "depths of the ocean, to know its vast biodiversity or its complex topography." He is fascinated by the mystery of what lies beyond, both in the water's surface as well as the vastness and immensity of outer space (Nel cited in Freschi (ed) 2011: 103).

According to Scoville (cited in Nel 2008: 8), Nel has been able to bring poetic aspects to the field of science and he comments on this as follows:

> Often in our profession, one becomes fixated on the details of narrow corridors, losing sight of the inter-connectedness and poetry of the whole. Karel's images distill these connections metaphorically, much like the physicist uses equations to unify phenomena in diverse environments and over vast ranges of scale.

Scoville (cited in Nel 2008: 8) goes on to comment that Nel, in his *Brilliance of Darkness* works, signals that "the darkness of space is central to both the human spirit and to our emotional health – indeed to our very existence." This observation underscores how Nel's travels, his deep interest in various cultures and artifacts and his fascination with scientific exploration in relation to artistic processes speaks to a sense of spirituality in its involvement with existential questions of the human condition. Doepel (1993: 3) writes: "His work should be seen in terms of search for the spiritual in art." This spirituality is related to a quest in understanding an 'inner space' and its relation to the external world and beyond. Nel has said that for many years he has been drawing

[34] In her MA dissertation (University of Pretoria) titled *Confronting gold mine acid drainage: art as counter-activity,* Louise Kritzinger (2010: 112) makes the following observation on Nel's *Reflective Field*: "The refractive nature of water and light is explored through a large four-metre vessel containing a ton of water. Due to the size of the work, it appears overwhelmingly physical, yet Nel and Scoville (2008:4) point to its symbolic qualities resulting from its reflective and absorptive properties. Nel states that "different perceptions of reality become visible, or invisible, at different times". It is the artist's intention that the viewer questions his/her being and place here on earth and in the universe, with the vessel as a source of information on which to contemplate (Dixon 2011:103)."

> […] from the 'minds-eye', from the inner world, informed by both concept, experience and imagination; at times [I] work directly from the object, translating [my] experience. Sensory experience is as important as 'mind's-eye' imagery" (Doepel 1993:7).

Nel has read widely on subjects relating to mysticism, the esoteric and religion including Zen Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, writings by Alice Bailey, the Koran, Tantra, the Kabbalah, mythology from Africa and Hawaii, to name a few. These writings have deeply affected and influenced his use of symbolism in his works. Although Nel does not prescribe to any one religion or spiritual path, he chooses to relay the simplicity of core notions of the different beliefs and practices that expand the notion of interconnectedness. Perhaps, in traversing such various fields of thought and translating experiences from these through his practice, Nel's artworks come to symbolize what Buddhists term "non-duality." The purpose of the works seem to "break through the barriers of thought to the non-duality which lies beyond the One and the Many, and all others of the 'pair of opposites' and is related to Samadhi […] With the achievement of Samadhi, the distinction between the mind, the object and their relationship is transcended, such states being achieved through meditation" (Humphries cited in Doepel 1993: 6).

In my discussion of works from the two exhibitions *Silent Thresholds* and *Brilliance of Darkness* as well as two of his water-based site-specific installation artworks, I have attempted to portray how Nel can be seen to engage with the ineffable in complimentary ways: through the physicality of objects and acknowledging their aura or phenomenological presence in space, and through the search for what is beyond our physical reach and our relation to the outer cosmic space. His engagement with the ineffable seems in either instance to be inextricably linked to forms of 'spatial' experience, also extending to what may be referred to as an 'inner space.' Swami Vishwananda (personal communication, 20 Feb 2015) is quoted in my opening to this chapter as saying: "Science nowadays is harnessed to conquer the outer space but saints have for ages concentrated on the conquest of the inner space within themselves." This awareness of outer and inner space seems to be hinted at in the philosopher Dennis Dutton's[35] definition of "art-making as an instinct, as an evolutionary development"

[35] Dennis Dutton (1944-2010) was a professor of philosophy of art at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand and wrote a book titled The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution (2009).

(Glencross 2011: 31). Dutton suggests that as much as creativity and the need to record and express moments and experiences are instinctual to humans, so does the will to explore the experiences of space internally and externally seem to be something deeply embedded in human nature. This attests to our ongoing quest to make further astronomical discoveries as well as to embark on spiritual quests of meditation and inward searching. Nel's work reflects an awareness of both aspects of an ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ space and its sanctity.

As already noted, Burroughs (2013: 5) comments in her essay that in the *Silent Thresholds* works, “Nel returns to the quiet process of looking inwards” in the confines of his studio. His working alongside astronomers on the COSMOS project involved “looking outwards into the universe” while with the *Silent Threshold* works:

> […] it is as if he has turned the telescope of consciousness around so that the instrument which previously brought near the vastness of a myriad of distant galaxies, now concentrates and reduces the intimacy – the immediacy – of his studio space to a distilled clarity, as if through the other end of the telescope.

This turning around of the telescope back onto oneself is significant in its focus on “one’s place at home and in the society one lives in […] the country of one’s origin, one’s connectedness to global issues […]” but ultimately it again leads to the “questioning of our position in the universe itself” (Burroughs 2013: 15). There has to always be an ultimate 'turning around of the telescope’. As much as Nel has travelled to other places, participated in the in-depth research of outer space, and journeyed with people from many different fields, he returns to his studio space and creates work that connects to a sense of a 'turning inward.' This is evident in Nel's ability to move between abstract representations and use of symbolic shapes and works that engage directly with the physical world. It is indicative of a process of exploring unknown territory as well as one's individual place in the world.

Chapter Four: *Ātmān*

> "Art Exhibition Imitating Life Forms: The lived experience is seldom a thing of beauty. it is a profound happening, a phenomenon of being, a metaphysical process of distilling the known, from the unknown" – (visitor's written comment on attending the opening of *Ātmān* exhibition).

My exhibition of creative work, titled *Ātmān*, was displayed at the "Point of Order" Fine Arts exhibition space, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (23 – 30 April 2015). In the L-shaped gallery comprised of two rectangular spaces on different floor levels, three large vertical canvases painted in acrylic and oil paint (2.9m x 1.3m each) plus a series of three large pencil and graphite drawings on paper (4m x 1.5m each) were displayed in the lower, main space of the gallery while smaller works featured adjacent to these works and in the smaller room above.

In the three large canvases thin washes and stains of paint had been applied over an extended period of time to create rich overlays of colour. Some added brushmarks were also included. The stains were achieved by laying the canvases on the floor and allowing the fluid paint to pool in areas. Once these areas had dried up they would leave the distinctly shaped stains on the surface of the canvas. Washes and additional marks were applied with sponges and brushes. The shapes and colours were intuitively ordered in the process of application and layering. I wanted to create abstract works that would reverberate through their colour and luminosity and engender a certain atmospheric mood. Through their large scale and the emerging and dissolving of open forms I wanted them to evoke a sense of the metaphysical.[36]

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[36] Two-dimensional artworks, such as paintings, have been a significant platform in the past century for exploring the metaphysical, especially in relation to the sublime, music and colour. Kandinsky's abstract renditions of his experience of music in art are a case in point. His paintings employ shapes, lines and colours in accentuating moods and tones associated with music. Maur (1999: 30) notes: "Kandinsky, who was convinced that colors could be heard and himself possessed this gift in high degree, believed that colors directly 'touched the soul." In 1948 Barnett Newman wrote his well-known essay *The Sublime is Now* that deals with the past representations of the sublime and its link to notions of beauty and ends by suggesting a move away from past representations: "The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history" (Newman quoted in Morley 2010: 27). The Abstract Expressionist movement is often characterized by its use of colour and scale in paintings. In Jackson Pollock's paintings the viewer is confronted by large-scale canvases which were painted, unconventionally at the time, on the floor by using the so-called 'drip'-technique. Mark Rothko's colour-field paintings present one with an indeterminate, ungraspable feeling and engage with the theme of emptiness/nothingness. Rothko not only wanted his paintings to intimate mortality, our impending nothingness, but, as he told Werner Haftmann, he also wished his paintings to "cover up something similar to this nothingness" and as Kosoi (2005: 30) points out: "By eliminating most of the components that are used to constitute painting, except the framed

The stretched canvases were placed directly on the concrete floor and leant back against the gallery walls so as to emphasize their placement as objects in space. This was an important element in defining a spatial reading of the exhibition as a whole. Bright powder pigments were sifted onto the floor in front of each of the canvases and direct spotlights were focused on each of the works to accentuate the colour and luminosity of the paintings as well as the powder pigments below. At the base of each of the canvases the sifted pigments were composed in the form of two bright colour fields that were carefully aligned to form a line in the centre, i.e. the two fields of bright powder pigment were made to meet centrally at the foot of the canvas. Towards their outer edges the fields of colour gradually faded out onto the concrete floor, suggesting a diffusion into space. The colours of the aligned powder pigment fields were selected to correspond to the colours and tonalities in the canvases so as to create a visual prompt. An element of smell was also introduced to the canvases by way of perfumed scents being rolled onto the sides of the stretchers with a sponge roller. These perfumes were specially made for each of the canvases, i.e. in response to their particular characteristics of colour and intensity. The perfumed smells subtly permeated the surrounding space of the gallery, transmitting another element of radiance.

A series of three large, vertically suspended drawings (4m x 1.5m each) executed in pencil and graphite on white paper accompanied the canvases. Made up of various gestural marks applied across the paper, the drawings were also abstract in nature but suggested spatial articulation through relations of linear marks and tonal shifts. A smaller work (1.4m x 1m) made with a two-toned yellow cotton thread sewn onto a sheet of transparent plastic was hung slightly to the side of these large works. The stitching across the plastic sheet created a web-like surface and by hanging it approximately 30cm away from the wall, strong shadows from the stitching were cast on the wall behind (as a result of the direct spotlighting as well as the ambient light). The display of all of these works was articulated in a way that would foreground a spatially experiential dimension through their placement and orientation to the viewer.

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surface and color, Rothko, as well as many other abstract artists, and as many critics have commented, pointed to nothingness as a negation and absence. This negation, though, emphasizes the presence of the paintings, as it draws our attention to the fact that they simply are, that they are something rather than nothing, and in this sense they conceal nothingness." In this sense the concept of non-existence, of emptiness and of limitlessness can be seen to be used as a vehicle for engendering a spiritual encounter.

Colour, light and shade, scale and materiality were carefully considered in this orchestration.

The three smaller works displayed in the upper level room consisted of two works of embroidered thread and paint on fabric (approximately 0.9m x 1m each) with powder pigment elements sifted onto the floor in front of them plus a canvas executed in paint and applied stitching (1mx1m). A loosely knitted and threaded work made with yarn and coloured wools was included in the window space (with approximate dimensions of 4m (h) x 6m (w)). A wall text definition of the title of the exhibition appeared in the upper room and read: "*Ātmān*: The self as the subject of individual consciousness, the soul, the supreme personal principle of life in the universe" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007: 144).

The exhibition combined different facets to create a synergy in space through which I wanted to evoke a sense of the sacred or the transcendent. My intention was to present works that would open up a contemplative space for the viewer so that an ineffable experience might be generated. The radiance of saturated colours in the large canvases, together with the addition of sifted powder pigments placed like offerings at their bases, were intended to provide a heightened perceptual experience. The added element of smell emanating from the canvases contributed another level to this experience. By way of allowing materials and surfaces to radiate an energy into the surrounding space, a reflective state would hopefully be engendered. In other words, the elements of gestural marks, colour, materials and smells would serve in connecting features between the physical and the immaterial, the visible and the invisible. In the choice of materials (e.g. powder pigments, yarns and washes of paint) the works may also be seen to speak to the ineffable through implied links to cultural and religious rituals as well as mythological themes. The use of coloured powders is a common feature in Hindu religious rituals. The festival *Holi*, for example, which is celebrated in India at the beginning of spring involves the joyous throwing of coloured powders by participants who are encouraged to dress in white. The brightly coloured powders thrown onto each other represents a celebratory sharing but the layering of powders finally also turns the white clothes to a darker shade that is said to resembles Sri Krishna whose skin colour is described as a combination of dark blue and black. It is finally symbolic of one attaining divine qualities or being in a state of experiencing the divine force that overthrows the force of

the human ego (believed to be the source of all conflict and arrogance) (Sri Swami Vishwananda Personal Communication: March 2015). The use of string can also be seen to feature symbolically in various cultural and religious rituals as well as in mythological narratives such as the account of Athena and Arachne, Penelope and Oddyseus and the figure of Helen in the *Iliad*. With reference to the title of my exhibition, the thread may be seen as linked metaphorically to a process of 'drawing out' from the invisible into the visible, thereby awakening a stronger perception of the life force that can be termed the *ātmān*. I will touch on these connections a bit further on.

The starting point of this body of creative work began with the two smaller embroidered works (Figure 20), which I started working on at the end of my undergraduate degree. As such, they feature as a bridging connection between my undergraduate and postgraduate years of study and extend on the concerns that grew out my undergraduate explorations with colour and thread. Prior to 2011 I had explored installation-based works combining various materials with threads that I used as lines in space, i.e. as a form of three-dimensional drawing. While the two embroidered works are quite contained in their object-like display, they allude to a sense of spatial mapping in their patches of cross-stitching in different colours. They suggest an alternate reading of physical and perceived space through the slowly accumulated sewing of coloured geometric forms.

In wanting to combine two-dimensional work with the idea of site-specific installation, I experimented with various materials through processes of drawing, painting and stitching as a means of generating visceral awareness and engaging with an emotive response to space. In past works, for example, I used coloured woolen threads to create a complex network of lines against very colourful paintings executed directly on the walls of my studio, thereby creating an immersive environment. The layered threads were visually articulated in response to the space and the viewer had to negotiate these by stepping across them to fully experience the work. In related drawings and paintings I explored similar processes of layering through creating networks of lines, shapes and colours. My initial intention was to use thread in the main room of the gallery space but the drawings and paintings developed independently from the thread-based works, i.e. I subsequently found other means to activate the space and to realize an evocation of the ineffable through material articulation.

The first of the two embroidered works was made with the intention of engaging with space diagrammatically through a slow process of intuitive accumulation, not unlike a form of mental architectural mapping, but in an intimate manner associated with craft-based processes of handwork. It was one of my first stitched artworks using the method of cross-stitching with coloured cotton threads on embroidery fabric. Starting in the top left corner of the square format of the fabric, I did not pre-plan the pattern but allowed it to develop along the way. Further into the process I also began to sew bits of tracing paper onto the material so as to introduce an element of semi-transparent layering. I also added longer, more freely stitched woolen sections to heighten the three-dimensionality of the work. The sewing process became a mental method of tracking time and progress. Each individual stitch was clearly visible as an accumulation towards realising the variously coloured shapes completed over a period of time. It was an attempt in trying to articulate a combination of layers of simultaneous physical, mental and emotional activity. As a 'performative' act it can also be seen to reveal the presence of ritual in my work – a kind of ritual that connects to quiet meditation in the religious context.

After a year of work on the embroidery I decided to re-work this piece by removing all but the cotton stitched areas. I felt that the piece had become too complicated and overworked. I continued stitching in cotton thread and also sewed bits of thin white cotton material alongside as well as over sections of the coloured stitched shapes. The softness and semi-transparency of the cotton material added a subtle allusion to depth within the two-dimensionality that the tracing paper could not achieve. I also incorporated painterly elements with the addition of watered down acrylic paint in certain areas. The combination of cream and pink paint added to open sections of the fabric visually complimented the threaded areas. The stains of the watered down paint moved across some of the areas that the stitching was meant to occupy, thereby introducing a fluid contrast to the structured stitching. Several areas of the off-white embroidery fabric were left untouched. In its final stage the work showed areas of neatly composed shapes in coloured cross-stitching alongside some chain-stitch tacking as well as some use of linear threads linking blocks of colour to each another. Some loose ends of stitching were also left to dangle. The combination of geometric shapes, softly painted areas, lines and use of bright colour presented a form of 'stitched painting' that also alluded to a map of some sort.

On entering the gallery space this work was the first to be encountered. It introduced a layering process that was also evident in the other works on display. Hung approximately 30cm away from the wall, the back of the work was also revealed as one inspected the work up close. The second cross-stitched work accompanying this piece was started many months after the completion of the first and followed a similar route in the making. Beginning with threaded areas of cross-stitching in an intuitive manner, I again later incorporated painterly elements. This work did not undergo as many transformations as the first one (which acted as a kind of blue-print) and the process was thus a more fluid one of mapping shapes. Both works were hung in the gallery so as to appear to be suspended mid-air when viewed from the front. This allowed their 'objectness' in space to be accentuated. Powder pigments were introduced on the floor in relation to these two works as an added element of spatial relation between the stitching and the gallery space. Two rectangular shapes of different sizes were mapped directly in line with the works in colours that corresponded with the coloured threads. By adding these small coloured fields on the floor I felt that I could extend the geometry in the embroidery to be in dialogue with the geometry of the gallery space.

The use of coloured thread has been a prominent part of my art practice in drawing connections between a physical and emotive experience of space. While I did not choose to employ thread throughout this exhibition, its use in the smaller works on fabric and clear plastic as well as in the form of knitted netting in the window display suggests its centrality to my way of working. In the work made by using a two-toned yellow thread on transparent plastic sheet, one was able to see both front and back of the work and it presented the threaded component as 'suspended' within a transparent field (Figure 21). The shadows cast against the wall further articulated this sense of suspension. The freely-sewn threads resulted in a combination of dense and sparse areas across the sheet of plastic and the layers of stitching resembled a process of bringing controlled and uncontrolled activity into balance. Allowing the stitching to be suspended on the transparent sheet of plastic drew attention to space. Symbolically, the space beyond the stitching and plastic represented to me a kind of 'inner clarity' where the material and immaterial might be seen to meet. This work has a particular significance to me as one of the works that pointed me towards a means of partially evoking an experience of the ineffable. I use the word 'partially' because this work had

not yet reached the full potential of expressing my intention. In the larger canvases I felt that I was able to realize this more fully.

The ability of thread and string to imply and create experiences of space has been widely explored in twentieth-century visual art. Marcel Duchamp, one of the pioneering figures of modern visual arts, used it in *Mile of String* presented at *First Papers of Surrealism*, October 14-November 7, 1942. For this retrospective exhibition of Surrealist art in New York he created a web of string between the artworks on display on the walls and screens. It acted like a veil that partially masked the architecture of the room as well as the paintings and as a kind of framing device for the exhibition it was an experimentation with 'sight' (vision) as well as 'site' (the exhibition space). String not only shifted the use of space specific to itself, but also encouraged different use of space in relation to other mediums such as painting. Lewis Kachur (2001: 209) notes in his book *Displaying the Marvelous* that this shift in the use of space was announced by Alan Kaprow in his comment that "mural scale paintings ceased to become paintings and became environments" which were a "bridge that led to action in actual space." These paintings "creat[ed] a kinesthetic spatial whole."[37]

Kachur also compares the use of thread as it can be seen to connect to the process and imagery of painting, specifically in the action painting drip-technique work of the Abstract Expressionist artist Jackson Pollock: "there is a visualization of the goal, but the question of precisely when the artist stops is undermined and only emerges in the process of "throwing" the lines." The "line is no longer a contour. It does not bound, rather it is a unit in the filling of a given container" (Kachur 2001: 207). The shift in context from a three-dimensional to a two-dimensional surface displays the fluidity of string in its capacity to embody a variety of intentions.

Further experimental use of string in the visual arts followed, for example, in the artworks of Eva Hesse who used rope, fiberglass cord, latex, and other versatile materials to create sculptural works. She is one of the first female artists to use such materials in her artworks and, as Kachur (2001: 212) comments, "[her] later piece, with

[37] Kachur (2001: 184) notes that elements of string feature throughout Duchamp's work: "It is present at the very turning point from Cubism to the object, the Chocolate Grinder No. 2 (February 1914), where carefully sewn threads reinforces perspectival and three-dimensional illusionism."

latex-coated string and rope of differing thickness, is more variegated in material yet still reminiscent of the more dense sections of the *Mile*." Her work, along with the works by artists such as Faith Wilding, Mona Hatoum, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and other women artists who use 'the subversive stitch', crochet and cord, is thus also seen to reference Duchamp. In the context of feminism such artworks are seen to be made by artists "who have reclaimed the material for their gender." They remind us that “even simple materials can have narrative as well as gender implications" (Kachur 2001: 213).

Mirjam Mencej (2011: 55) notes in her essay *Connecting Threads* that thread and yarn “has acquired many symbolic connotations associated with very basic foundations of human existence such as birth, death, and fate.” The use of thread as a symbolic signifier is common across many cultures. For example, cotton thread is a very significant element used in many religious Hindu rituals. It signifies an integral part of wedding ceremonies and other religious cultural days, for example, the day of “Raksha Bandan” honours a sibling-related bond whereby a sister would tie a coloured string around her brother's wrist. In other instances the string is the conduit between one's prayer, the natural world, (mother earth known as *Bhu Devi*) and the invisible God. A red string is representative of the prayer and is tied around a specifically chosen tree trunk in order to connect to the divine power in the earth and sky. Red strings are often worn on one's wrist after a prayer because the string has the ability to absorb energy vibrations and this is a way of the participant to benefit from the prayers long after it has ended. Apart from Hinduism, the act of wearing a string for reasons of protection, strength or any other specific intentions, are used and referenced to varying degrees in other traditions and religions such as Judaism and Islam. Processes involving the handling of thread are generally repetitive and ritualistic, requiring time and energy. Many of the works on my exhibition relay the sense of an investment of time much like tapestries, carpets, fabric, as well as the ritual of meditation and prayer convey. The medium of textile is a potent vehicle in expressing a deeply embodied materiality and threads afford a deep link to continuity and process (Gwynne 2011: n.p.).

While also somewhat thread-like, my large pencil drawings on paper represented a softer and more ephemeral representation of line (Figure 22). The three large drawings were hung vertically from a metal railing that extended away from the wall, allowing the sheets of paper to hang loosely in space like scrolls. The drawings were abstract

expressions of moods and thoughts conveyed through my recording of gestural movements in the form of marks made across the paper. The height and scale of the works imparted a sense of expansion and the verticality of the compositions added to a sense of an upward extension in the space of the gallery.

The sense of verticality is strongly expressed in the painted canvases in reinforcing a sense of suspension. Writing on the topic of *The Auratic Experience of Here and Now: an analysis of the aura of a work of art through visual and aural culture*, Kira A. Dralle refers in her essay to such vertical articulation of space (as opposed to horizontal space in which we are moving through time linearly) as a way towards becoming "atemporal." She expresses this as follows:

> We are stripped away of our temporal causality, as we are suspended in a space between our physical existence and the divine. Above - between us and God – lies a "cloud of unknowing" that our understanding can never penetrate. Between ourselves and the world, we must create a "cloud of forgetting," leaving conscious thought and desire below. In this timeless place of forgetting and unknowing, we may begin to hear for that which we are listening (2011: 3).

A characteristic of mystical or religious experience is its vertical orientation – the horizontal realm is what is within our grasp whereas the vertical realm is beyond our grasp or control.[38] A sense of this element is what I tried to convey in my three vertically oriented paintings situated alongside and opposite the large drawings (Figure 23). While the canvases are physically grounded by being placed directly on the floor, their vertical formats create a strong sense of movement upwards into the space of the gallery. The powders at their bases add to this sense of upward movement in the way in which the saturated colour fields meet exactly at the centre of the canvas in a perfect line. The radiance of the colours together with the dramatic alignment creates a sense of vibration, much like the vibration of sound that extends into the colours of the painting above. The powdered pigments were applied very carefully with a sieve to distribute the powder evenly onto the floor as a soft and velvety surface, a feature that may remind of Kapoor's pigment sculptures in which the immaculate surfaces appear pristine and

[38] Using height as a means to convey an experience of the other-worldly is clearly articulated in religious architecture, notably in Gothic cathedrals with their high buttresses and arches. Modern sky-scrapers can be said to be expressions of aspiration in their verticality.

untouched. The powders at the base of my paintings may similarly be seen to provide a point of visual access to the work through the vibrant colours yet they also act as barriers - a threshold of sorts that simultaneously draws one towards the works as well as restricting closeness (Figure 24 and Figure 25).

In writing on Nel's work, Doepel (1993: 7) notes: "The artist talks of the evocation of a sensory experience by stimulation of another sense. Colour might evoke sound, a fragrance or taste." This phenomenon of "the production of a mental sense of impression relating to one sense by the stimulation of another sense, as in coloured hearing" is commonly referred to as "synaesthesia" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007: 3148). It is an element that I also wanted to evoke in my exhibition. As already mentioned, I incorporated an element of smell by introducing specific scents to each of the canvases. With the assistance of Swami Vishwaparanthapananda, who is an expert in the field of perfumery, unique scents were formulated for each of the paintings and applied to the sides of the canvases. The scents were intended to subtly emanate from the paintings and diffuse into the space of the gallery much like the powder pigments seemed to blur into the surrounding space on the floor. Perfumed oils and essences together with an alcohol liquid base were combined in arriving at the specific tinctures. The first scent was made up from a combination of rose and fresh saffron, creating a soft and sweet aroma. This complimented the predominantly pink hues in the painting to which it was applied. The second was made from a combination of freshly ground cardamom and vanilla pods, creating a spicy yet alluring scent that complimented the intensity of the purple, pink and blue hues of the painting. The predominantly warmer orange and yellow painting was accompanied by the rich fragrances of nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and a small amount of cardamom.

In his book *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday life* Thomas Leddy (2012: 69) writes about the aesthetics of smell as being rare in writings about the fine art but says that "it is conceivable that smells could be refined and organized to the point where they are a medium for an artform." He continues:

> The point is not without controversy: some philosophers have held that perfumery is a minor art at best. More recently, Shiner and Kriskovets have argued that perfume can be art if it makes a statement in an artworld context and calls attention to its embodiment. Otherwise, they insist, it is a

> commercial product that may however provide aesthetic pleasure and even be a classic of design.

Leddy goes on to state that the experience of smells can afford significant aesthetic pleasure and that smell has a powerful emotional connection too:

> Rachel Hertz, a specialist in olfaction, observes that the amygdala, the brain's emotion centre, is the limbic structure that interacts the most with the olfactory centre. When we perceive a scent the amygdala is activated. Hertz describes a personal experience as a child that shows not only the emotional impact of smell but also the frequent relation between smell and the feeling of happiness: "I remember squeezing the translucent turquoise shampoo into my hand and lathering it into a bubbly and delicious foam in my hair, but most of all what I remember is the exquisite scent that arose from the bubbles. I had never smelled anything like it before – sweet, piney, watery, and mysterious – and it seemed to me to be the most sublime aroma on earth… I became intensely happy for the first time in a long time." Note the use of the aesthetic term "sublime" in this description: […] everyday aesthetic experience can also be sublime (Leddy 2012: 70).

Contemporary visual and aural arts frequently juxtapose elements that go beyond formal relations of lines and colours, tones and rhythms and in recent times, "the differences between the visual and aural arts, on the one hand, and the arts of smell and taste, on the other, have become considerably less dramatic" (Leddy 2012: 71).

The sense of smell accompanying my three large canvases enhances the perceptual dimension of the works in space. The vaporisation of the perfume into air presents an invisible element that compliments the spatial experience of the works. The relation between painting (solid canvas and paint), powder (a less stable solid) and scent (vapour) implies a subtle point where the dissolution between material and immaterial, visible and invisible can be seen to occur. As the quotation by Leddy illustrates, the use of smell can evoke strong emotion and together with colour, luminosity and the experience of materials and substances in space, the combined synesthetic experience can have an intrinsic effect on the viewer.

My choice to use powder-based colours can be seen to derive from the earlier powder pigment works of Kapoor's as well as the dust and related earth pigments used by Nel in his artworks. However, I was also drawn to the work of the German artist Wolfgang

Laib[39] who is well known for his sculptures and installations using beeswax, milk, marble, rice as well as pollen. He spends many hours in the natural environment collecting various pollens from trees and flowers by hand and then carefully sifts these into square configurations directly onto gallery floors. The tiny pollen particles are thereby consolidated into luminous yellow fields that are charged with a strong organic energy. They are symbolically linked to notions of life and resurrection. Donald Kuspit writes about Laib's practice as one that "embodies time within the contemplative practice and pace […] by retreating to the deepest introversion to recover one's sense of being real in a world that makes one feel unreal […] to recover a sense of true, primary being" (Kuspit cited in Hecht & Ekstrom 2001: n.p.).

Apart from seeing such work as connecting with various fields of thought and beliefs such as Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Native American and Aboriginal cultures as well as Minimalism, there is a universality and a purpose in seeing the connection between the artist to his or her materials and the broader environment and community (John-Paul Stonard 2009: n.p.). Laib says:

> I think that in most cultures, artists were not considered as individuals who had to invent or create something. They were participating in the whole, in the universe. So, for me, the sky is much more important than trying to make a painting that is a symbol for the sky. For me, it's the pollen itself - that is the miracle in which I participate in my daily life when I collect the pollen. It's not mine (Laib cited in an interview with Sarah Tanguy 2001: n.p.)

This humbling position of engaging as a participant rather than as a creator or inventor reinforces a sense of interconnectedness that Laib explores in his work. It also comes close to what Nel explores through his work by using dust. The vulnerable nature of the powdery pollen or dust reflects the momentary nature of an experience. A moment of experiencing eternity is a paradox imbedded in the ineffable.

[39] Wolfgang Laib (born in 1950) was originally a medical doctor by profession and changed careers as he "found the profession focused on the body at the expense of the soul." He has worked often in a state of solitude and with organic natural materials.
(http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag01/may01/laib/laib.shtml)

Yoon comments on Laib's work as representing the aspect of the numinous that is over-powering, unfathomable and where "there is the feeling of one's own submergence" (2010: 49). Laib's process of collecting the pollen is repetitive and meditative in nature and he “considers this collection process itself to be anonymous, owing to his belief that its power and relevance extends beyond the visible universe.” In this sense Laib's work can be seen to take on a spiritual function, constituting privileged access to the numinous (Yoon 2010: 50). Yoon goes on to describe Laib’s pollen fields as an "intermediate domain pertaining to neither its materiality nor its form" (Yoon 2010: 51). His seemingly simple forms and choice of material embody the complex creations of nature that are awe-inspiring and ungraspable. As with Nel’s use dust, Laib relays the simplicity of mystery that is a component of the ineffable.

In 1987 Laib started to construct large and small house-like structures from beeswax. The large house structures allowed viewers to enter and be enveloped by the scent of the wax and the glowing colour of the natural substance. Hecht and Ekstrom (2001: n.p.) comment that

> […] these forms are houses, and they are also openings, that present metaphorical spaces of access to transcendence. Laib places his houses in the emptiness of the gallery to illuminate the surrounding space. As a result, the space, as well as the forms, “stand revealed.” The numinous groundwork re-sanctifies the space of the gallery. The gallery space becomes a macrocosm of sacred space – to the art form as a microcosm of scared space. Laib’s work exemplifies the contradictory states of being, of immanence and transcendence – immanence, in which the sacred reveals itself in the ordinary world experience, and transcendence, in which the sacred is beyond mundane experience.

The minimally reduced yet deeply sensuous quality of such works engages the viewer on an intuitive and sensual level. In a similar manner, I wanted the abstract quality of my artworks to engage the viewer intuitively and sensually. Kapoor describes abstract art in the following terms: "[...] it doesn't deliver meaning [...] it allows meaning to emerge, [...] when meaning emerges in that way, it has a deeper resonance" (http://anishkapoor.com/288/Mehboob-Studios-2010–2011.html). Similarly, the aim in my artwork has been to try to evoke the intuitive through a direct engagement with material in space in order to engender a meditative and heightened experience for the

viewer. What would be the purpose of creating a contemplative space? Kapoor provides a simple answer:

> All of us want to be moved, want to be able to be engage, [...] intimacy, the intimate contact between a person and another person, between a person and an object, is something we long for, all of us, it is the most exciting and engaging thing there is. Art is very good at intimacy, [...] at saying come and be part of this process, which is why I believe it is fundamentally democratic (Kapoor 2010-2011: n.p.).

My own interest in the spiritual in art is articulated in my own artworks through exploring different mediums that evoke specific emotive and contemplative states that in some way also relate to the philosophies and experiences that have most transformed my own thinking and life. I have read numerous texts on Hinduism, Christianity, Sufism and Buddhism. Such philosophies on the nature of being and existence have transformed my perspective on human interactions, developing an awareness of one's self as a multi-faceted being. Meeting regularly with my spiritual teacher since 2006 has also opened up different perspectives and through practicing certain meditation techniques I have observed a growing awareness of my own thoughts, feelings and motivations behind actions as well as of my surroundings, people and circumstances.

This on-going practice has brought an awareness of the *ātmān* in daily life (on a microscopic level), as well viewing experiences and situations as a whole from a distance (as a macroscopic outlook). It is a subtle process, difficult to describe in words, that fine-tunes one's perception and generates a greater understanding of one's intuitive faculty. It is through this process that my interest and passion in the realm of the ineffable, revelation and spirituality has manifested in my art practice. Nel once stated "For me work and pleasure is the same thing" (Nel 2010: n.p) in response to a question about how he had used an amount of money he was awarded to further his research. His statement encompasses the ability for one's life to be experienced as a whole, where all components interlink and develop proportionally.

The two artists whose works I have chosen to examine both practice a form of self-analysis through methods of reflection that are not overtly spoken about but are evident in their work. I have mentioned Kapoor's long-standing practice of psychoanalysis and in Nel's work there is a reference to the chakras, the image and significance of the

lingam, as well as an engagement with closed-eye drawing techniques and his own meditative practices. Doepel (1993: 7) expands as follows:

> The artist's [Nel's] first experience of 'creative visualization' techniques took place at St Martins School (London). He reports that the colour experiences in this period were very intense. He spontaneously 'saw' (in his mind's eye) a cone with an infinity sign placed above it. This was the subject of two works Presence (Cone 1) and Presence (Cone 2). Early drawings depicting 'mind's eye' imagery are brightly colored, and focus on simple shapes. Closed-eye mediation on colour and shape is advocated by the Arcane School, finding its counterpart in the stimulus for imagery in Nel's earlier work, the rotating motif often being employed. Such exercises have led to the artist developing eidetic imagery, such that a picture might be visualized in the mind's-eye before an actual drawing is begun.

The mind's-eye, often also referred to as the third eye or the Ajna chakra, is an energy centre located in the middle of the forehead in line with the space between one's eyes. This centre is said to connect the unconscious and conscious mind and relates to the moment when the invisible meets the visible during the creative process. It is often within these transient moments that one experiences a sense of completion through union of one's intention, mental focus and physical actions. This experience can be understood as an ineffable experience (http://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/ājñā/index.html).

The term *ātmān* is a Sanskrit word used in many of the holy Hindu texts such as the Vedas. According to Vedic philosophy [40], the *ātmān* is the individual soul or inner-self, the essence of life within each living being and inanimate objects. The term also holds the meaning 'breath' in the *Rig Veda* which encapsulates the foundation and source of energy through which all actions are made (http://www.wisdomlib.org/ definition/ atman/index.html). The quality of the *ātmān* is a pervading sense of unity in consciousness throughout the known and unknown, as the following passage outlines:

> Comparable (although not equivalent) to the Western notion of the soul, the concept of atman occupies a major place in Hindu philosophical and theological reflection. The atman is deemed to be the very foundation of

[40] The Vedas are the most ancient Hindu texts dating back to 1500 BC. They are divided into four main sections, each consisting a numerous amount of details texts: the Ṛig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. They are written in Sanskrit and contain deep philosophies of both the physical (referring to daily life on Earth) and metaphysical (understanding the philosophical elements of the soul and universe) realms. Many practices and prayers that were written in the Vedas are still practiced at present (http://www.wisdomlib.org).

> one's spiritual nature and identity. The atman doctrine of Hinduism, nevertheless, has had a tremendous impact on Hindu philosophical and ethical thinking. Since many Hindus claim the atman is found in all living things, this doctrine helped make Hinduism more amenable to embracing ahimsa (non-violence) as an ethical precept, as well as cultivating an awareness of the interrelatedness of all life, in which the "Self is seen as other" and "Other is seen as the self." Soteriologically (the study of salvation from suffering), Hinduism in some forms teaches that moksha (spiritual liberation) is attained through knowledge of the atman. This view of salvation is known as Atmavidya (self-knowledge/realization) by which it is meant introspective knowledge of humanity's innate divinity (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Atman).

Buddhists reject the concept of the *ātmān* because they propose "that such ideas are fabricated by humans in order to deny their impermanence" and they are cautious in using the term in order to prevent confusion between the ego-self (implying a transient nature of life based on the continual fulfillment of temporary desires) and one's self that experiences the equanimity of mind and being as taught by the Buddha. However, the "Buddha-self (or Buddha-dhatu)," described as the "true self" that is "uncreated, immutable and present in all living creatures," is very similar to the notion of *ātmān* as referred to in Hinduism (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Atman).

In some Hindu texts, the *ātmān* is a part of the *paramātmān* which describes the greater collective soul. The process of experiencing one's *ātmān* merging into the *paramātmān* may involve various techniques in order to generate an introspective approach. This notion can be likened to Burrough's description of Nel's "[turning] the telescope around" as well as Kapoor's interest in the "back of the cave," as discussed in my earlier chapters (Nel referenced in Burroughs (2013: 5) and Kapoor in (http://www.gallerie snow.net/shows/anish-kapoor-descension/). Kapoor speaks about moving away from the Platonic cave analogy, i.e. instead of remaining in the darkness which embodies the degeneration of self, one is encouraged to move outwards toward the light, symbolizing intellectual and spiritual progress. Kapoor's creative exploration is representative of a meeting with one's inner darkness that is, according to him, more familiar than light. As he expresses it: "Light is something, if you like, that we wake into. My instinct is that it is not an internal condition" (http://www.anishkapoor.com/178/In-conversation-with-Marcello-Dantas.html). His preoccupation with the void, particularly the internal void, is representative of his preoccupation with his 'internal condition.'

The experience of one's internal condition is particularly vital in the experience of the *ātmān* and as Kapoor notes, the comfort of knowing our internal condition (with reference to one's inner darkness) "[...] is both frightening and intimate" (http://www.anishkapoor.com/178/In-conversation-with-Marcello-Dantas.html). He expands on this as follows:

> In dealing with the issue of the back of the cave, as I call it, one almost inevitably runs up against religion. It is literally a clash with a reality that brings out some fundamental questions about Being. It's inevitable. The purpose of abstract representation, for me as for many other artists, is to try to get to the bottom of these questions. And at the bottom of these questions there is consciousness, that is a dimension that science is unable to define, to fully grasp. Art is precisely the privileged path to consciousness (Kapoor 2015: n.p.)

I have come to observe that the experience of connecting with the *ātmān* is an ineffable one because the *ātmān* is itself ineffable. Awareness of the *ātmān* is much like a revelation or a 'peak experience' that Maslow's refers to when he says: "Think of the most wonderful experience of your life: the happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly 'being hit' by a book or painting, or from some creative moment" (Maslow 1962: 67). His comment points to the simplicity of ineffable experience and it's ability to inwardly transform oneself; the creative act of art-making can certainly be a catalyst. According to holocaust survivor Dr Viktor E. Frankl, a change in one's mindset is the only freedom one has: "What alone remains is the "last of the human freedoms"- the ability to "choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances". This ultimate freedom, recognized by the ancient Stoics as well as by modern existentialists, takes on vivid significance in Frankl's story." (Allport cited in Frankl, 1994: 9). This is demonstrated in a moment of his (Frankl's) own life that he vividly recalls whilst in the concentration camp, namely his understanding of love, particularly his love for his wife, that enabled him to momentarily transcend the outer circumstances. [41]

[41] Viktor E. Frankl (1905 - 1997) wrote the book *Man's Search for Meaning* (initially published under a different title in 1946) which documents his ability to find a purpose in his life after World War Two. Frankl was a neurologist and psychologist known for his existential research as well as for developing Logo therapy.

In the reciprocity between an artwork and the viewer a 'peak experience' or ineffable moment may be encountered. The viewer is him/herself the locus of the experience. Doepel (1993:4) comments on this aspect in relation to Nel's work when he observes that

> Nel also acknowledges that the spectator is a 'co-creator' and constructs meaning. The work of art is incomplete without the creative participation of the spectator. There can be no single correct reading: reality is conceived of as a dynamic web of interdependent events.

In my own artworks on the *Ātmān* exhibition I also aimed at connecting with the viewer through the elements of colour, light, materiality and scale.

Sarah Tanguy (2010: n.p), an independent art critic and curator based in Washington D.C., states in an interview with Wolfgang Laib:

> For me, your work is about embracing contradictions, creating a spiritual physicality that combines existentialist practice with Platonic and utopian aspirations. It's also about substituting an archetypal or primal definition of ritual that's connected to naturalism for one that in contemporary, Western life involves a more detached practice rooted in urbanism.

This observation can also be applied to the work of Nel and Kapoor. It is through technological means that both artists' works have been manifested in the way they have: Kapoor's highly refined technical production team and Nel's COSMOS team that captures the most accurate data of outer space at present. The 'urban' refers not only to technology but also to a current way of life that calls for a renewed experience of the spiritual in art. Tanguy's statement is in someway very much related to my intention in the specific combination of the spiritual, the physicality as well as a sense of ritual, embodying the constant effort towards this union. The versatile elements of materials in this exhibition points towards an over-arching exploration of space and the expression of what I had come to perceive as the *ātmān* during this creative process. [42]

[42] A talk by the controversial 'cultural terrorist' Zebulon Dread was coincidentally hosted by the Wits School of Arts in the "Point of Order" space on the final day of my exhibition (30th of April 2015). Dread, who was born Elliot Josephs and lived in the Cape Flats for the greater part of his life, invented the persona Zebulon Dread in 1997 and "stalked South African culture with a brash, beautiful, in-your-face magazine called *Hei Voetsek!*" (Prabhala 2014: n.p.). After shaking up politicians, the media, advertising and the general public from their comfort zone, Dread had a change of persona and is now known as Swami Sitarama Dasa, a Hare Krishna devotee and self proclaimed 'black guru.' He says:

As I established Zebulon Dread, I'm now establishing Sitarama Dasa and the future of my work, and life, as a black guru. Zebulon Dread was the guru of irreverent, satirical humour whereas His Grace Sitarama Dasa is an orthodox Vedic Brahmana, preparing to launch himself into the public sphere as the first black guru representing the science of India, the Bhagavad Gita, and taking on the hypocritically devout religionists who have raped the African mind of its original spiritual consciousness. Everything I've done – including Zebulon Dread – was meant to lead me to this point in my existence (http://chimurengachronic.co.za/the-cosmic-lives-and-afterlives-of-zebulon-dread/).

During his talk he addressed various topics relating to identity, politics and current social values and went on to ask an open question to the group: "Who are you?" His question was meant to prompt the audience in thinking beyond their physical, cultural, social, national identities and to realize the soul or spirit and breath as the essence of identity. Not referencing the artworks around him, he nevertheless may have made a similar connection to the ineffable and *ātmān* in his statement of shifting from the physical and easily identifiable to the mysterious yet prominent realm of perceptive life force which he sees as the core. The conversation then led to prompting artists to employ courage in their creative process for "art [to] relay the fearlessness of the soul" (Dread, 30 April 2015). In spite of his often crude narrative manner he was able to bring an awareness to the poetic quality of Hindu Mythology. The talk could also symbolically represent a continuous and more integrated dialogue of different fields of thought.

Conclusion

> Space is freed for the ineffable, for wonder, for the indeterminate, for difference and for community. This loosening of focused attention makes room for other kinds of experiencing "to be perceivable." Art is a domain where the speed of life gets a chance to enter slow time. Easing into the fullness and the texture of the present. Which is also familiar as a meditative practice - and sometimes art can take us there (Simon 2013: 121)

In this research I have discussed examples of artworks by Anish Kapoor and Karel Nel in examining how their particular creative engagements are seen to be concerned with evoking aspects of the ineffable. I have set out to show how both artists engage with materials and elements of space and time in conveying or expressing the ineffable, defined as that which is too great to be expressed in words or that which is unutterable, indefinable or indescribable. As I point out in Chapter One, in which I introduce the notion of the ineffable and how it can be seen to link to artists' aesthetic pursuits, the notion of the ineffable, as it relates to terms such as the holy and sacred, the sublime and numinous, carries strong spiritual and religious connotations. But as Yoon (2010: 130) states: "contemporary artists understand and express the concept of spirituality in far broader and more personal terms than has previously been the case [...] These shifts in spiritual understanding, and the subsequent attempts of artists to visually represent that understanding in Western art history, demonstrate that the process of expressing or approaching spirituality in art is a constantly changing one."

This changing approach towards expressing the concept of the spiritual is reflected in the individual or particular manner in which each of the artists articulates the means at their disposal. I have tried to tease out how both artists can be seen to explore numinous elements and experiences, aspects of contemplation (pertaining to perceptual experience) and issues concerning transcendence. Both artists shy away from describing their work in overtly spiritual or religious terms but their works contain elements that are central to the sphere of the spiritual and religious. Kapoor's and Nel's concern with the notion of the void, for example, connects to East Asian philosophy and religion where the interconnection between the concept of the void and spirituality dates from the 13th century. As Yoon (2010: 59) points out:

> In Shanshui painting, for example, voids were meant to suggest the 'mystery of emptiness' based on the Taoist speculations about the significance of the non-existent – 'a void which was never mere atmosphere but a vehicle for spiritual realization' (Rowley, 1959 p. 71). The voids created within the image through fog and mist, are not, of themselves considered important, but play a significant role in facilitating the appearance of the mysterious. Such a conception of the 'void' in Shanshui painting has had no parallel in traditional Western landscape painting because this has always emphasized the existent rather than the non-existent. This is clear from the manner in which the sky was perceived as a space-filled realm and not a vehicle for importing a sense of the infinite. These kinds of ideas about what, in Western art, would be termed 'negative space,' constitute a key theme in Eastern Asian art and symbolize imaginative representations and modes of access to the numinous itself.

The void was thus not understood as mere atmosphere but as "the vehicle for the numinous which may be thought of as spiritual emptiness or nothingness." By making emptiness more important than solidity the void "functions as a negation in order that the numinous may become actualized" (Yoon 2010: 63). I have tried to show how both Kapoor and Nel engage with this idea of void and nothingness as positive conceptions that carry mystery and unfathomable potential.

In my chapter on Kapoor's work I foreground his carefully considered use of material in relation to space and how he thereby ties his sculptures to both a corporeal and an ineffable dimension. According to Kapoor, "sculpture is an organic volume in the place that houses it and for the person who perceives it" and an interplay between sculpture, viewer and environment thus characterizes all of his installed artworks (Mercurio and Paparoni 2011: vi). By looking closely at examples of his pigment sculptures, mirror works as well as his recent smoke and water installations I have demonstrated how his work can be seen to present objects that are difficult to grasp in their entirety. Kapoor refers the 'non-object' which relates to the aspect of an object revealing itself slowly in its environment. This is perhaps best exemplified in his mirror surface stainless steel works in which he explores reflection and a disorienting activation of space. One of the characteristics of Kapoor's work and practice is a fascination with the unknown and the void. I relate this interest to his ongoing engagement with psychoanalysis as well as his awareness of Buddhist philosophy in which notions of inner space and void are evidently connected to spirituality. I also show how his work can be seen to embody the unity of opposites such as: empty/full, dark/light, positive/negative, material/ephemeral. I finally presented Kapoor's site-specific installation works *Descension* and *Ascension* as two very different articulations evoking the ineffable through the materials of water and smoke respectively. The downward surge in *Descension* and the upward surge in

Ascension may be seen to link in sculptural terms to Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1938) which simultaneous implies movement towards the ground and the sky. Kapoor's work is shown to bring together his experiences and his explorative processes that he describes as a form of 'doing' by way of 'not knowing.' This approach gives rise to spontaneous creative acts in the space of his studio through which he can be seen to explore the ineffable.

In the following chapter on Nel's work I mention the wide interests that underlie the artist's artworks, creative processes, collecting of artifacts and travels across the world. I refer to his contacts and collaborations with respected persons in the fields of science, anthropology, fine arts and paleoanthropology. Beginning my discussion with works from the *Silent Thresholds* (2013) exhibition, my intention was to foreground Nel's admiration and respect for the work of Constantin Brancusi who has been an inspirational artist role-model since his childhood years. The connection of Brancusi's studio to his own is examined with reference to the idea of 'aura' and carries significance in the way in which Nel articulates ideas around the symbolic space of home and 'belonging.' His studio is the place to which he always returns. I then discuss his involvement with the COSMOS project and the works displayed on *The Brilliance of Darkness* exhibition. These works demonstrate Nel's ongoing interest in the field of science and deep space in its cosmological dimension but also point to his fascination with the philosophical and spiritual significance of the notion of darkness. I also go on to discuss two of his site-specific installation artworks that involve the use of water and its properties of bending and refracting light in demonstrating how he is able to translate a sense of the ungraspable in material form. In his art Nel engages profoundly with both the physical and the symbolic. I have attempted to show how he can be seen to engage with the ineffable through acknowledging the physicality of objects and their phenomenological presence in space as well and through the search for what is beyond.

In the discussion of my exhibition titled *Ātmān* I note that it represents my own particular expression and engagement with the idea and experience of the ineffable. My choice of the title *Ātmān* points to my concern with evoking the numinous. It is defined as: "the self as the subject of individual consciousness, the soul, the supreme personal principle of life in the universe" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007: 144). I describe my artworks and the materials and processes with which I have chosen to work and go on to outline how I have tried to present the viewer with a sense of the numinous through the display of my exhibition. With reference to the works of Kapoor and Nel as well as those of the artist Wolfgang Laib, I discuss my use of brightly coloured powder pigments together with paint on canvas as well as drawings and thread-based works.

The exhibition has allowed me to reflect on the *Ātmān* as a subtle force that is, however, also very powerful and undeniable in its presence.

Yoon (2010: 122) observes that "[...] in order to visualize the numinous in art, natural elements such as fire, water, mist, mountains, rocks and light are frequently selected to convey this spiritual state" (2010:122). In my discussion, for example, of the use of water in some of Kapoor's works and in Nel's, I have pointed to the use of this element as a powerful signifier that has a long history related to the numinous and spiritual. Water is symbolically associated as a purifying medium in many religious and spiritual traditions. Yoon (2010: 122) notes:

> […] Christian churches have an initiation ritual involving the use of water. Baptism is a symbol of liberation from the oppression of sin that separates us from God. In Hinduism water also has a special place, because it is believed to have spiritual cleansing powers. To Hindus all water is sacred, especially rivers, and there are seven sacred rivers (Alter,2001 p.3). Water is an omnipotent theme among both popular and the intellectual beliefs and practices of ancient Asia, such as animism, Shintoism, shamanism, Taoism, Zen Buddhism and the symbolic geography of Wind-Water (*Feng-Shui*).

Through reference to both the physical and symbolic, I have explored the understanding of the *Ātmān* and its relationship to the creative process in addressing the notion of the ineffable. In his book*, Gitangali: Songs of Offering* (1913), the well-known Indian poet and artist Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), poetically describes his relationship to the ineffable and sublime force as: "Immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable" (Tagore 1913: 1). The clarity of transformation and unexplainable joy when encountering this ineffability is conveyed in his statement and it points to the fact that it is only in the expansiveness of the ineffable, sublime or connection to the *ātmān*, that one can experience a state that is liberating and real.

List of Illustrations

Figure 8 Kapoor, A. *Descension*. (2015), Water and motor, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy. Image Source: http://www.designboom.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/anish-kapoor-galleria-continua-san-gimignano-designboom-08.jpg

Figure 9 Kapoor, A. *Ascension* (2007), Mist and generator, Galleria Continua, Beijing, China. Image Source: http://db-artmag.de/cms/upload/52/onview/kapoor/15_anishkapoor13v.jpg

Figure 10 Kapoor, A. *Ascension* (2011), Mist and generator, Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice Biennale. Image Source: Ascension: http://inferno-magazine.com/2011/10/06/anish-kapoor-ascension/

Figure 11 Nel, K. *At the Threshold* (2013), Pastel, metallic dust and dry pigment on bonded fibre fabric, 181 x 181cm. Silent Thresholds Catalogue.

Figure 12 Nel, K. *Radiance: House Within* (2013), Pastel, metallic dust and dry pigment on bonded fibre fabric, 94 x 241 cm. Silent Thresholds Catalogue

Figure 13 Two Photographs of Constantine Brancusi's Art Studio, 11 Impasse Ronsin, Paris. Image Source:
http://static.canalblog.com/storagev1/phomul.canalblog.com/repro_0032.jpg
http://40.media.tumblr.com/5408f40cf68b51c1dce8afc36055c575/tumblr_mmoue9aqad1r1p7nfo1_1280.jpg

Figure 14 Nel, K. *11 Impasse Ronsin* (2013), Pastel, metallic dust and dry pigment on bonded fibre fabric, 241 x 178 cm. Silent Thresholds Catalogue.

Figure 15 Nel, K. *Stellar Calculus* (2008), 540 million year old black carboniferous dust and prehistoric salt from the atomic testing site, White Sands, New Mexico, 170 x 170 cm. The Brilliance of Darkness Catalogue.

Figure 16 Nel, K. *Composing Darkness* (2008), 540 million year old black carboniferous dust and salt, 80 x 80cm. The Brilliance of Darkness Catalogue.

Figure 17 Nel, K. *Sound Syntax* (2008), 540 million year old black carboniferous dust and salt and vermillion pigment, 100 x 200cm. The Brilliance of Darkness Catalogue.

Figure 18 Nel, K. Trembling Field. (2012), Steel, etched mirror, water and light, dimensions unknown. This work was exhibited on the *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts Exhibition* (2012), Washington D.C. Image Source: http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/cosmos/images/Trembling-Field-Nel.jpg.

Figure 19 Nel, K. *Reflective Field* (2011), Rectangular container, water, mirror, approximately 4m x 2m. Image Source: https://marvellousartmusings.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/water-the-delicate-thread-of-life-030.jpg

Illustrations

Figure 20

Kalan, S. Two Hand-stitched Embroidered Works. Cotton and Paint on Material. *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015). Dimensions Approximately 1m x 1m each.

Figure 21

Kalan, S. Hand-stitched Plastic Work. Cotton, light and soft plastic. *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015). Dimensions 1,4m x 1m.

Figure 22

Kalan, S. Drawings. Pencil and graphite on Fabriano paper. Dimensions 4m x 1,5m (each). *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015).

Figure 23

Kalan, S. Installation Image. *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015).

Figure 24

Kalan, S. Installation Image of Paintings and Powder Pigments. *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015).

Figure 25

Kalan, S. Red and Pink Painting and Powder Pigment, Dimensions 2,9m x 1,3m, *Ātmān* Exhibition (2015).

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